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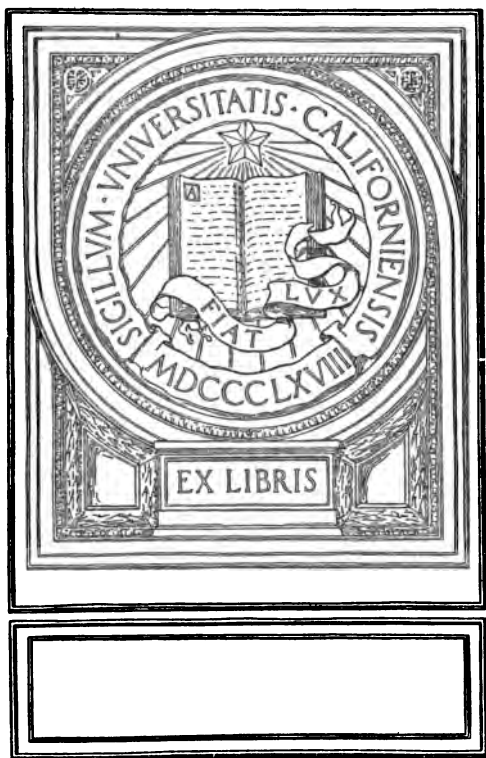
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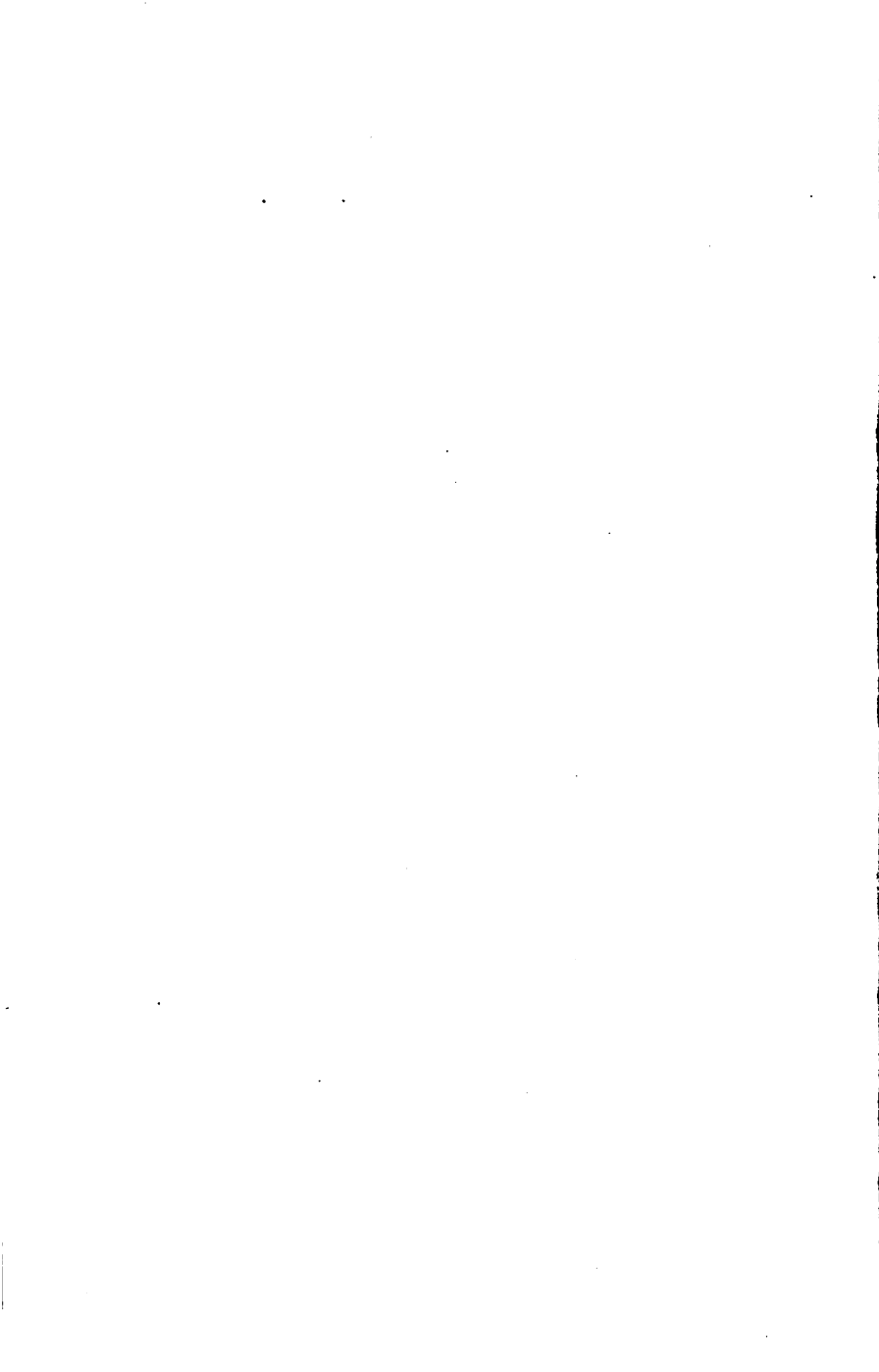
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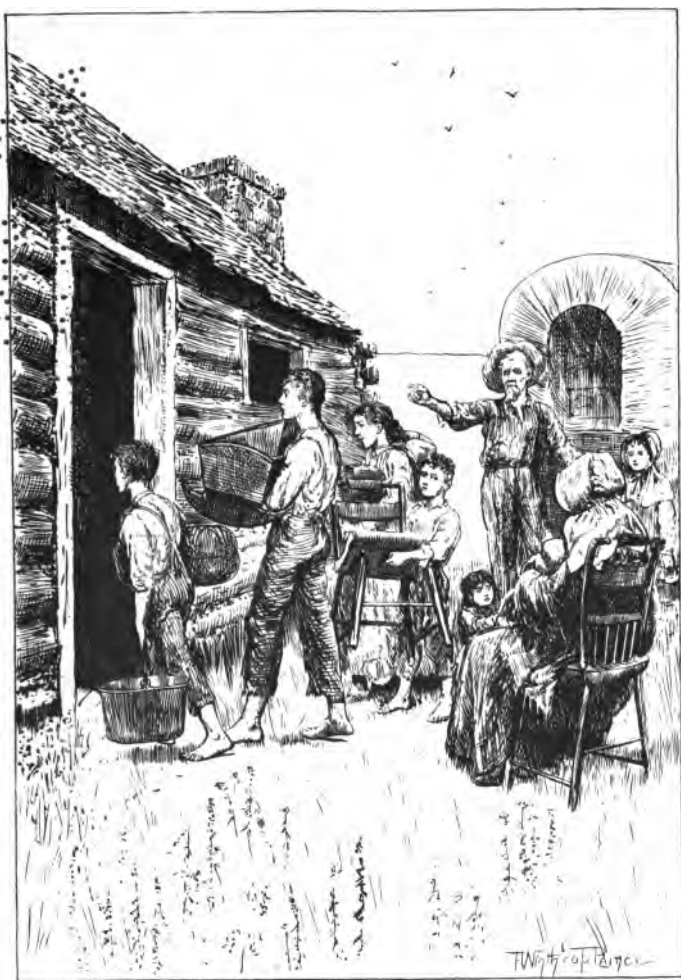




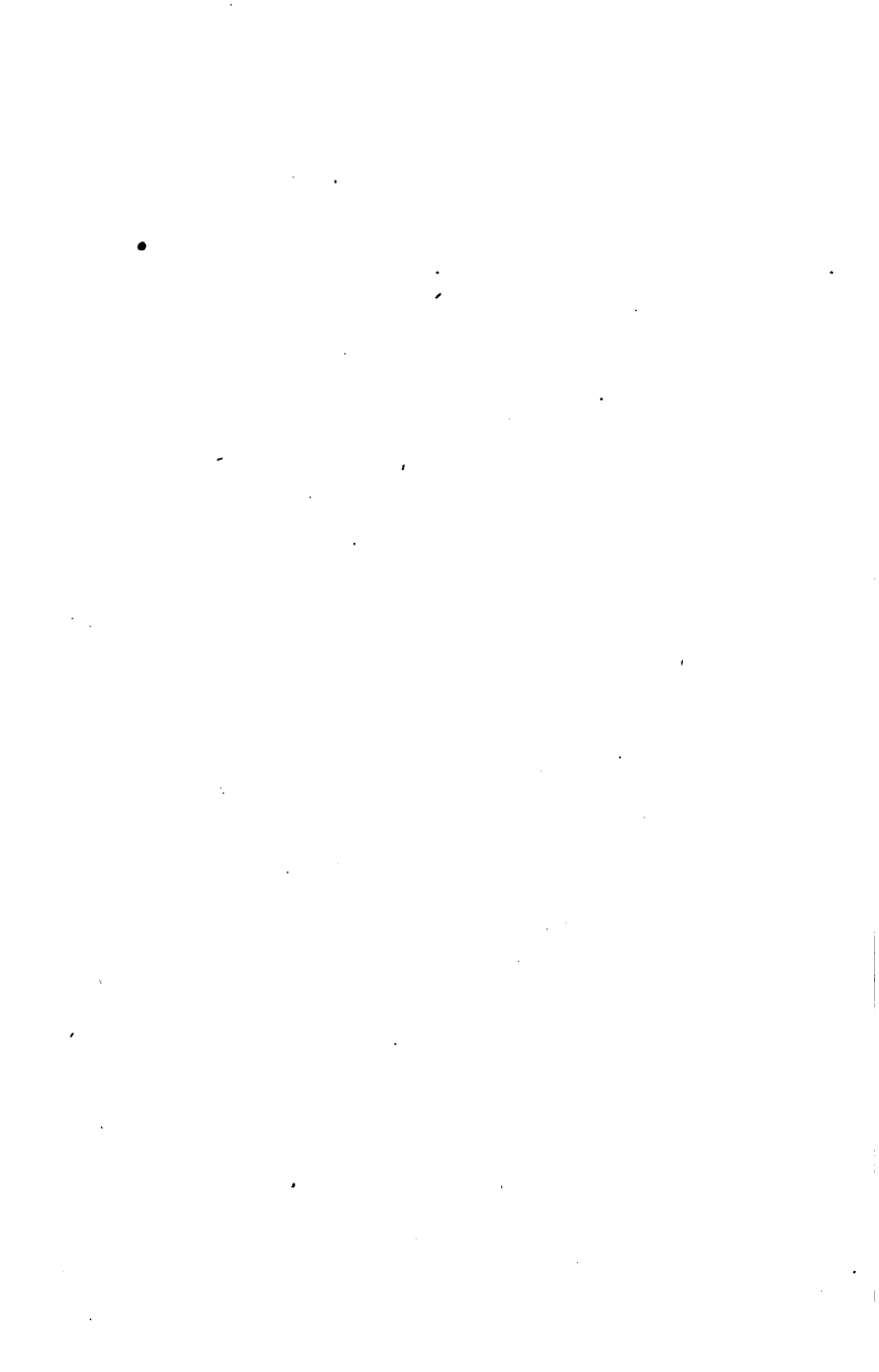
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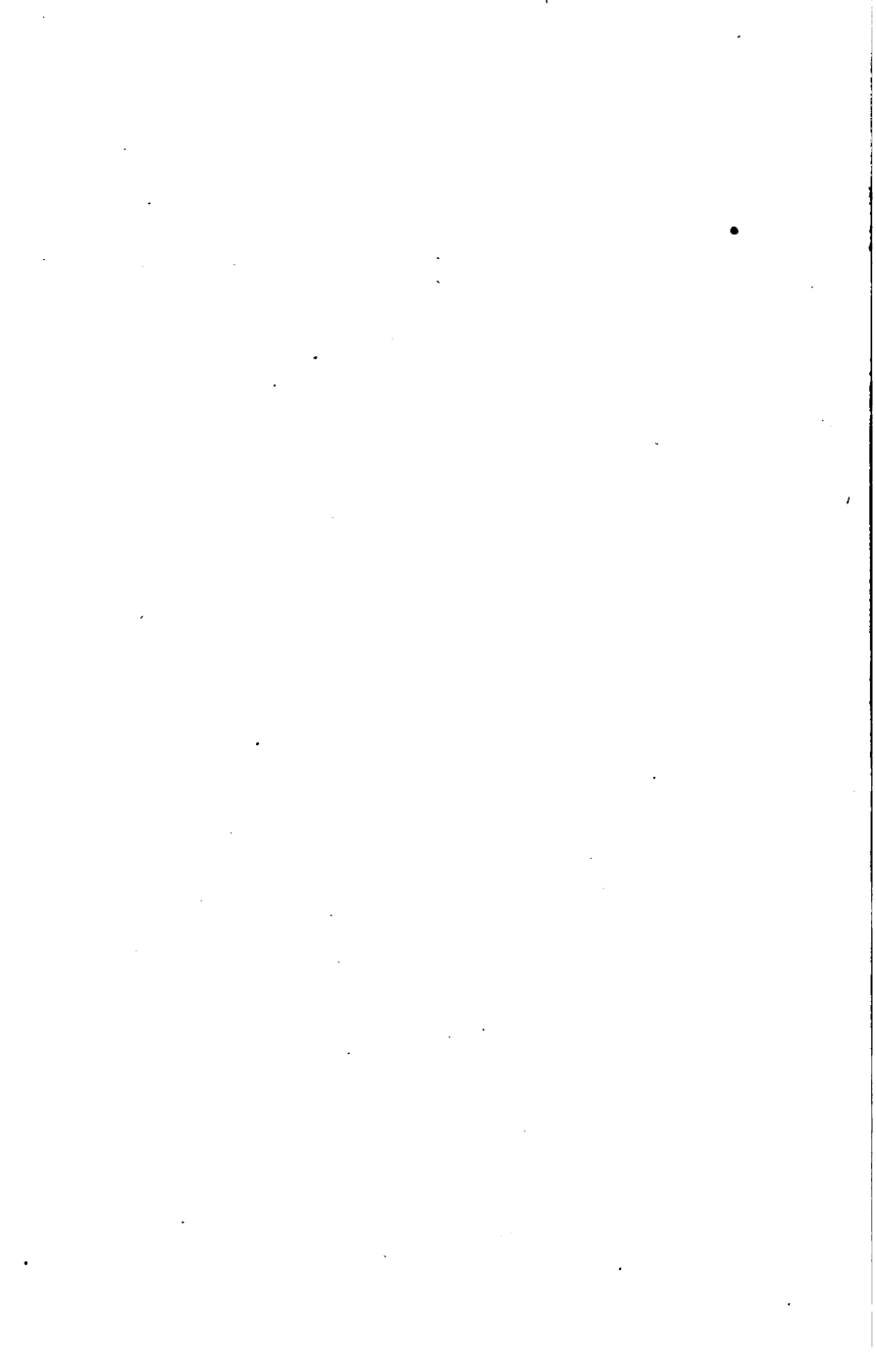
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The Moving-in.







# BILLOW PRAIRIE

BY  
JOY ALLISON, *pseud.*

*CRAIG, Mary H*



BOSTON AND CHICAGO :  
Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society.

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# BILLOW PRAIRIE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE SETTLERS.

THE sun was setting on Billow Prairie. His last rays fell upon the dingy cover of a dilapidated emigrant wagon, just as it came to a full stop before the door of a small log house. The horses, an ill-matched pair, one large, gaunt, and old, the other diminutive, bony, but tough and wiry, and evidently good for the best half of the load, were alike weary, and glad to be free of the harness, and permitted to browse upon the grass, which, though brown and dry with the frosts of late autumn, still retained some nutritive properties.

The wagon had scarcely stopped, before half a dozen children swarmed out of it, climbing over the wheels, eager to get upon their feet, and see the new home to which they had been looking

forward during their slow, toilsome journey. They were active, vigorous children. The youngest, that could barely walk, scarcely cared to accept from the slouchy, cadaverous little man whom they called "pa" the assistance he offered. The wife and mother was not so independent of help. She first gave into the man's arms a very small, soft bundle that she had been carrying, and then, leaning her hand on his shoulder, clambered out.

"Wall! here we are, safe and sound, Marthy! 'T ain't quite a palace, is it?" said the man, glancing over the dilapidated little cabin, and laughing uneasily. "But don't you go to gettin' down-spirited. It 's a shelter till we can do better, and that 's all. As John Faxon said, I can chink it up so it 'll do us for the winter."

"Pa, O pa! we 've found a well!" shouted Marvel, a tall boy of fifteen, sallow and untidy, after the type of his father. "But the water 's no good," he added. "There 's a dead rabbit in it."

Felix Windom turned his one eye — some accident had deprived him of the other years before — upon his eldest with a frowning gaze.

"Get it out! Get it out — short meter! Don't stand there gawping, you numb" —

"Don't call the boy names, Felix," interrupted his wife. "I don't like it."

"Can't help it. That Marv has such a stupid way of standin' with his mouth wide open after he has told a thing."

There was a sad, hopeless look on the wife's face as her eyes followed the retreating form of her boy, and she sighed deeply.

"Just see what a hole there is in the roof!" said she, as they stepped in at the door of the poor cabin. She looked round in vain for a seat; for she was pale and weak, and the weight of her three weeks babe was no slight tax upon her strength.

"Wall, as I was sayin', a few strips of bark will stop the holes, and keep out the wet. So don't you go to worryin'. We 'll have it all metamorphosed in no time."

"Who 's been worrying?" said Martha plaintively. "I 'm sure I have n't said a word anybody could take for complaining. I say now, as I 've said many a time, I don't care where it is, nor what it 's like, if it 's only a home, and it 's



ours, so nobody 'll get it away from us. What I want, and have wanted for years, is a place of our own, where if we set out trees and flowers, and tend 'em, we shall get the good of 'em, and not have to go right off somewhere else, and leave 'em to other folks. I've moved hither and yon till I 'm tired of it. I've been pulled up by the roots, as it were, and set down in a new place times enough to last a lifetime; and now, if we really have got to a place where we can stay, I 'll be a contented woman. But do get me a chair, Felix. My back is fit to break, standing up with this baby. And then get the things out of the wagon as fast as you can, and get them in here. It 'll be dark soon, and Ryder 'll be in for his supper."

Ryder was the driver and owner of the team that had conveyed the family hither, for Felix Windom owned very little besides the wife and seven children he had brought to this home upon the prairie.

Obedient to his wife's request, he brought her a chair. Then lifting up his voice he summoned to his help the boys and girls who had scattered to spy out whatever there might be of promise about the place.

"Here, Marvel! take in the cradle. Put a pillar in it so your ma can lay the baby down. Lavinie, here 's a quilt; you can carry that. Diodema, you may carry in these chairs, as soon as I 've untied the ropes. They 've pulled and jolted till they 're in the tightest kind of knots; but 't won't do to cut them, for this rope belongs to the bed."

Every child was soon busy carrying and bestowing in the cabin the few poor articles of furniture they had been able to bring. The bedstead was set up in one corner, corded with the rope that had bound the chairs to the outside of the wagon, and made the receptacle of everything in the shape of bedding or clothing. The stove was set back into the wide stone fireplace. There was no need of any of that patience-trying work of fitting joints of stove-pipe, for they had but one short piece, which they pushed up into the rude chimney. But the draught proved perfect, and a fire was quickly burning.

"Now, water for the tea-kettle," said the mother, who had been busy directing and helping, till a crimson spot shone in the center of each cheek, — an indication of extreme fatigue.

"That water 's no good! We can't drink it!" said Dean, twin brother to Diodema, though so small that he would easily pass for eight or nine years old, while she would receive full credit for her twelve or thirteen years. Having little else to bestow upon his children, Felix Windom had given to each what he considered "a fine, high-sounding name." After Marvel, Dean, and Diodema, came Rudolph, nine years old, Lavinia seven, and Carlotta three. No name had yet been found fine enough for the new baby.

"I guess the water is good enough. There 's nothing in it now, is there?" said their father.

"No; we took the rabbit out, but " —

"Then it 's all right. Good enough!" was the paternal fiat. He started for the well, followed by all the children; while Martha, weary to the last degree, and sick at heart, leaned her head against the bedside and waited.

"I can't drink that!" said Diodema positively, making a wry face as she bent over and looked into the well.

"Diodema, just you go in and help your ma. I 'll 'tend to the water," said her father. But Diodema did not seem greatly to fear his displeas-

ure, for she still lingered to hear what the driver would say as he came up to the well.

"Water bad, is it?" said he, looking down. "Faugh! my horses would n't drink that! Lucky I watered them at the last crossing. That well has got to be cleaned out before anybody can drink the water. Give me a bucket, and me and Marv will go to the neighbors and fetch some. 'T ain't more than a mile, I reckon, and I 'm as dry as a fish."

It proved something less than a mile. While they were gone the cabin was further set in order, and the table, a rude, home-made affair that had been knocked to pieces for convenience of transportation, was knocked together again, and set upon its legs, and dishes spread upon it for supper. When this was done, the cabin began to seem a little like a home.

"Have you seen the Book, Felix?" asked Martha, still busy searching in sundry boxes and barrels.

"No, not as I know of. Children, did n't none of you see the Book nowhere?"

"I saw ma tuck it into the corner of the little blue chest last night," said Lavinia.

"I've looked there," said the mother, turning her troubled eyes from one face to another, in the hope that some one of her little flock would be able to tell her where to find the missing volume.

"Never mind, Marthy," said her husband. "It's somewhere, and it's bound to turn up some time or other. Here's the boys. Now let's have supper."

The boys came in, filling up the small room so that there was scarcely space to move about. They were all hungry, and it was hard to make them wait patiently till the kettle boiled, and the Indian meal could be made into a hasty pudding, or mush as they called it. When at last it was ready they gathered closely around the small table, and fell to eating without ceremony.

But Martha did not sit down to eat, for two reasons. The presence of the driver made the table so full that there was no room for another, and her mind was disturbed by the loss of the Book. As soon as the rest were fairly seated, she went on with her search in every box and basket, and even turned over the bedding, and went out to search the empty wagon, but all in vain.

"I would n't keep a fussin' about that Book,

if I was you, Marthy," said her husband, who, having satisfied the cravings of his own hunger, awoke at last to the realization that his wife had had no supper. "Here, sit in my place. I'm done! These cubs 'll eat everything before 'em, and you won't get a mouthful 'less you go in for your share while it 's a-goin'."

"I don't care," said Martha. "I don't want any supper. I don't see where that Book can be. I have n't missed a reading since I promised Granny when she lay a-dying. She said, 'Read if you can't pray,' and she made me lay my hand on the Book and promise I would; and I've done it till now every night soon as supper was over, and now whatever am I a-going to do?"

Her tone was despondent. It was plain that she was deeply troubled.

"Here 's a leaf got tore out of my old Testament and wrapped round some marigold seeds," said Diodema. "You might read off 'n that to-night, and likely the Book 'll turn up to-morrow."

"Did you bring the rest of your Testament?" inquired her mother, taking the leaf and looking it over.

"No; I thought 't was no use. It was all torn

to pieces. The baby chewed off the corners, and tore half the leaves out, — not the new baby, — Lottie, I mean."

The driver rose from the table, stretched himself, yawned, and sauntered out to the vicinity of his wagon; and Martha, fearing lest her family would become scattered before the reading was accomplished, began at once.

The leaf contained the latter half of the seventh chapter of Romans, the whole of the eighth, and a small portion of the ninth. Martha was but a slow reader. Her husband held himself in no wise bound by this promise of hers, but he humored her in its performance; and sometimes, when she stumbled badly in the reading, would take the Book and read himself. He was not the best of readers. His pronunciation of some words would have drawn a smile from cultivated hearers, but he had abundant confidence in his own ability. He had once, for a little time, taught school; and the glory and dignity of a schoolmaster had invested him ever since, in his own eyes and those of his family, who easily forgot that he was set aside as incompetent, after the district had suffered under him a part of one winter. As one means of

maintaining his position as a man of learning in the eyes of his little world, he read the newspapers, when he could obtain them, and gave his opinions on matters in strong, confident language.

Romans was hard reading for Martha, and she stumbled along painfully, making little sense of the verses. So he once more took the business into his own hands, and read to the end of the chapter.

It is doubtful whether any of the family understood much of what was read. They looked upon it as a ceremony to be gone through. What it was all about they scarcely thought. And yet I think it was not useless. At the very least it was to them a daily reminder of the existence of God, and that they owed some duty to Him; and, having taken this one step in its performance, they would be more likely to take the next. "The entrance of Thy Word giveth light;" and no one who continually turns his face toward the light, however blindly and unintelligently, will fail of getting good at last.



## CHAPTER II.

## THE LEAKY ROOF.

"It will storm to-morrow, Felix," said Martha, one morning about ten days after the arrival.

"You 've prophesied a storm so many times when there hain't none come, that I 'm kind o' dubyous whether or no prophesyin' is your gift," said Felix, his sallow visage relaxing into a smile. "It does look like it this time, though, and it stands to reason this soft weather can't last always."

"Then won't you patch the roof to-day? What Dean has done would n't stand any kind of a storm, though he tried the best he could, poor lad! The wind would take his sticks and grass off in no time."

"They 're pretty big sticks! Marv helped me get 'em up there," said Dean. "But maybe pa better fix it some more. Maybe the rain would get in, and that would be bad for ma and the baby."

"Trust Dean to look out for ma and the baby," said Felix. "They 'd be bad off without you, would n't they?"

"Ma is n't very well, and the baby is so little," said the boy apologetically.

"That 's so! Wall, I 'll go down to the creek and see what I can find. I reckon some strips of bark, and a few poles to bind 'em down, will be about the thing. Some day we 'll have a shingled roof, tight and snug. I heerd there was a saw-mill a piece down the creek, and I 'm going down and try for a job. I 'll take my pay in shingles. Hey, Marthy? How 's that for a plan?"

Martha smiled faintly. She did not seem much elated. Her comforts were always to come "some day."

"You 'd better take Marvel with you to help fetch the poles," she said.

"May I go too? O pa, say, may I?" said Dean, pressing forward with eager eyes.

"No. You 'd get tired, and ma wants you to help her and keep her spirits up. And see you get that roof all cleared, ready against I get home with the other fixin's."

"I 'm a-going!" said Diodema with decision.

"I can lug home bark, and I want to see the creek. I have n't been nowhere, nor seen nothin' since we got here."

"You? a girl! Better be in the house mindin' the baby," said her father. But Diodema paid no heed to his words, and quickly made herself ready, and followed on after her father and brother.

The creek was about a mile distant. A narrow strip of woodland bordered it on each side; and, although this wood was comprised in somebody's "claim," the country was so new, and things went on in such free-and-easy fashion, that, within reasonable limits, people could help themselves to what they wanted. Therefore, Felix Windom had no scruple against cutting saplings, or stripping bark from large trees, with which to patch his roof.

Dean had submitted to his father's decision without a word, and now stood watching till the party was well out upon the prairie, and then he turned to his mother.

"Do you think I'd better clear off the roof? If something should happen so pa did n't get it done, what I put on would be better than nothing, would n't it?"

"Yes, indeed, it would," replied his mother. "We won't have anything taken off till we see him coming with the bark. It won't take long to clear it, then. A storm is coming this time, sure, and I don't fancy a hole right over our beds. I'd sooner have you put more on, than take any off."

"Some pieces of turf would hold the grass down if the wind should blow," said Dean. "They would keep out the snow too. Shall I cut some?"

"No," said his mother, after a moment's hesitation; "there's plenty of other work needing to be done, and I hope pa will get the bark on. We ought to have more coal in the house. But fetching coal is hard work for you. I wish we had a wheelbarrow, or a little cart; it would be such a help."

"Ma, there's Vinnie's little wheel. I saved it when the wagon got all broke to pieces. I thought I could make a wheelbarrow with it some time."

"And did you bring it down here?"

"Yes; I buried it in the corn. Nobody knew it was there, and I forgot it." He went to a barrel

that stood in one corner of the cabin. It was nearly full of shelled corn, — the precious store that stood between them and starvation. He thrust his hands down deep, and brought up the wheel.

“See there! Now if I had some boards and nails, I could make a little wheelbarrow,” said Dean with bright, eager face.

“But we have n’t any,” said his mother. “Hide it away again. It ’ll come to use some-time; and if the children get sight of it they won’t be easy till it ’s broken.”

The little ones, Rudolph, or Rolfe as they shortened the name, and Vinnie and Lottie, had been outside at play; but Dean heard them coming in, and hastened to hide the little wheel deeper than before.

“I reckon we ’ve got to have some coal, anyhow,” he said, after a little pause. “Rolfe and Vinnie can go with me, and we can bring home a heap, if we all work.”

“I ain’t a-going to go!” said Rolfe, a thin, dark-complexioned little boy of nine years. “I ’ve got to have my chill to-day.”

“Maybe you won’t have any,” said Dean.

"Oh, yes, I will! I never miss when my chill day comes."

"I believe you had one yesterday. You won't have one to-day," said his mother.

"You 'spect I don't know when my own chill day comes? I guess I do! And I'm bound to have a chill to-day," insisted Rolfe.

"Well, then, Vinnie and I must go and do the best we can," said Dean. "I'll take the wooden bucket, and Vinnie can have the tin pail."

Three miles westward over the prairie lived John Faxon, who had once lived neighbor to Felix Windom in Southern Illinois. He it was who had written to them of the deserted claim, and assisted them in securing it. Among the advantages he had enumerated to induce them to come and take possession of it, was a bed of soft coal. True, it was small in extent, and of poor quality; but to the destitute settler it was no small advantage. It helped materially to make existence possible through the first winter of their life in Kansas.

Felix had dug down into the bed, and thrown out a quantity of this coal; and Dean and Vinnie, armed with an old fire-shovel, set off to bring it

home; while Rolfe proceeded to verify his assertion as to its being his chill day, by growing blue about the lips and nose, and, creeping into the trundle-bed, buried himself under quilts and comforters to shake out his usual period of time.

Back and forth went Dean and Vinnie with loads heavy for such small arms and shoulders, till the box was full of coal, and a small heap had accumulated near the back door.

"It takes so many pailfuls to make such a little heap," said Dean, taking off his cap and wiping the moisture from his forehead. "My arms are fit to break off, and it looks just such a little, after all."

"I would n't bring any more till after dinner. I 'm going to get it right soon," said his mother. "I wish it could be covered up. If it should snow, it would be bad getting at it."

Dean looked thoughtful. "If we only had a cellar," said he. "I wonder if there is n't a little room under the floor."

"Course there is," said Vinnie. "Did n't I lose Dio's thimble down through a crack? Pa pulled up one of the floor boards and got it, and I saw. There 's heaps of room!"

"We might have a trap-door, and put the coal down there. I reckon it would be handier than to dig it out of the snow," said Dean. "May I saw off a board or two, and make one, ma?"

His mother consented; and some of the floor boards were soon removed, sawed, and put down again, leaving a hole in the floor big enough to pass up and down. By careful search, and discreet subtraction of a nail here and there from sundry boxes, Dean made out to nail the short pieces together with cleats, and the trap-door was complete.

After dinner, with patient labor, he brought the coal from the rear of the house, and bestowed it where it would be available in case of a storm. Then he gathered every stick and chip that could be made into kindling-wood, and hid it all away in the same safe place. Evening closed in early; for heavy clouds in the west hid the sun, and made the short day still shorter.

Martha's wisdom in awaiting her husband's return before clearing off the roof was proven, for he came not, even with the darkness.

"I should think the want of victuals would fetch them home, if nothing else can," said



Martha, going to the door, and straining her eyes to look through the night shadows. "Well, we 'll shut the door, Dean, and light the lamp, and set it in the window where they can see it, so they won't lose their way. It 's going to be an awful dark night."

There were two windows in the cabin; that is, there were two openings cut in the log frame, and fitted with wooden shutters. Since his arrival, Felix had made a rude window sash, in which he intended to set glass; but because he had no money to buy it, he had come to a full stop, and for the present no good had come of his labor.

The lamp was lighted and set near the opening, the shutter being removed, and the door was closed.

"I want my supper," wailed little Lottie. Martha laid the baby down, and cooked supper for the children: the same fare they had had for breakfast and dinner; corn-cakes, mixed with water and a little salt, and fried on a griddle. The stove was very old and dilapidated, and the oven had lately given out, so that it would no longer serve for baking.

The poor wife had much ado to keep on hand

the small amount of salt pork necessary to grease the griddle. Felix was "so fierce after meat," as she phrased it, that if he knew there was a bit in the house he would have it, regardless of future needs, thinking, with his usual facility, there would be a way to get more to-morrow.

"Don't you, one of you, dare to tell pa that I 've got this," said she, bringing out a fresh slice from some hiding-place, and tying it up in a bit of clean cloth for use and safety. "I 've only this, and land knows where we 'll get any more; and how would I fry the cakes?"

"We won't. We won't tell!" they promised solemnly, knowing well how serious a matter it was for them.

The supper was hardly cooked when voices and a hand upon the wooden latch told of the return of the absent ones. They came in, filling the cabin with noise, and chilly, damp night air. Dean closed the shutter, and set the lamp on the table.

"What made you so late, Felix? Did you think you was going to fix that roof in the night?" asked Martha.

"Oh, did you get it cleared off, ready?" said

Felix, glancing upward. "No?—wall, that 's all right, then. I thought maybe you would n't. We 'll fix it all right in the mornin'. We could n't get much bark. Fact is, the bark won't peel this time o' year. Might a know'd it. But I got the poles, and in the mornin' we 'll cut some grass, and make a good thick coverin', and bind it down strong, and I guess that 'll shed rain, and keep out snow. We thought we 'd try if there mought n't be fish in the creek. I know 'd you was fond of fish, and Marv had his hook and line. We caught a few little things; but we got so fierce for something to eat that we built a fire, and cooked 'em and eat 'em. And jest as we was pickin' the bones, what do you think?—Faxon came along; and he took us off over the creek to see his claim, and two big hogs he 's got, and I spoke for a piece o' meat when he kills. Wall, it took us so long to get round, that we was ruther late home, that 's all. But don't you fret, Marthy. We 'll fix that roof all snug and tight in the mornin'. I 'm glad supper 's most ready, for them little fish did n't stand by me worth a cent."

Martha had long ago learned that it did no

good to fret at her easy, improvident husband, so she simply hurried supper upon the table.

"What makes you fry them so thick, ma?" said Diodema as she helped herself to a cake. "I like them thin a great deal better."

"It takes too long to fry such a lot of thin ones on this small griddle," replied her mother.

"We 'll take 'em as we can get 'em, and be thankful," said Felix good-humoredly. "Pitch in, child'en."

The children were not slow to obey. Each took a cake in hand and began to eat. Martha continued her work of frying till all were satisfied, and then left a little pile upon her own plate untasted, till she should read from the leaf.

"I 'd give up that business, if I was you," said her husband. "You lost your Testament, and that ought to be excuse enough for not keeping your promise. You 've read that leaf over and over; and I 'm bound to confess that, with all my learnin', I can't make head nor tail of half the verses."

"Oh, now, do, — don't Felix! Let me read! You need n't listen much, if you 're tired to-night," pleaded Martha.

"May n't I read, ma?" said Dean. "I want pa to see how I 'm getting ahead. I can read it most as well as anybody now."

Dean took the leaf which his mother yielded not unwillingly, and read with considerable fluency the verses from the twenty-fifth to the thirty-second of the eighth chapter of Romans, the last verse being, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

"I can understand that last verse," said Martha. "It means that Christ died for us all; and if he 'd do that much for us, he 'll give us what we need of other things."

"Why don't he then? We need a good many things that I don't see no way of gettin'," said Felix.

This was rather a difficult question for Martha. She had some thoughts, but little power of clothing them in language. "Perhaps it means up in heaven," she said doubtfully, seeing that she must say something.

"Then I wish it did n't," said Felix. "If we could only get things we want by bein' religious, why 't.would pay. I 'd read twice a day, and

maybe put in a sort of prayer, if things went that-a-way! But here we air! I 'labor and tug and strive,' as the hymn-book goes it; and we go without meat and heaps of things we want, and I don't see 's we get much help out 'n our religion, what little we purtend to hev."

"It can't mean that God would give us things to eat and all that, and we not work for 'em," said Dean, whose eyes had been full of thought while this conversation went on. "I don't know what it means, but I 'm sure it don't mean that."

"Why not? He did feed folks without their workin' once't: sent down manny, — some kind of sweetish cakes, I reckon, — right down out of heaven, for a whole army of folks that he 'd helped get away out of Egypt," said Felix, recalling some memories of the teaching of long ago.

"Oh, tell us about it, pa! Is it a story? Tell it!" demanded the children.

So, while Martha ate her supper, the father, pleased to display his knowledge to his admiring audience, told the story of the Israelites' escape from bondage, and journey through the wilder-

ness. The account, as he gave it, would be more amusing than profitable, and the poorest Bible student would be amazed at some of his "facts," and wonder where he found them. But his hearers were not critical, and listened eagerly.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE SNOW-STORM.

THE wind rose before midnight, and Martha woke to listen to its shrill whistle about her dwelling. Soon she became conscious of a fine, light mist-like snow falling upon her face. It increased till she seemed to be in the midst of a small snow-storm.

"Felix! Felix! do wake up," she cried, tugging vigorously at the elbow of her sleeping companion. "Wake! It's snowing all over the bed. We shall get our death of cold."

"What do you want?" murmured the sleeper. "S'posin' the snow does come in some. Can I help it? There ain't no fixin' that roof to-night."

"No; but do get up and get something to keep it off of our heads. My shawl will do. And see if the children are all right."

Felix's one virtue, good-nature, did not fail him even when waked out of a sound sleep, and forced to get out of bed and go about a cold room in



search of wraps. He lighted the lamp, found the shawl, and spread it over his wife's head, looked at the children, and, as they were all sleeping soundly, pronounced them "all right," and crept back into bed.

But he was not to be let off so easily. He had scarcely drawn the first long, sonorous breath of sleep before one of the little ones cried out, "Pa! o-oh, pa! it's snowing all over my bed, and in my face."

He rose once more, and, groping in the dark, found some kind of a garment, which he shook clear of the snow that had sifted in upon everything in the room, and, laying it over the little girls' heads, as they lay cuddled close together in the trundle-bed, he said, "There, keep that over your heads, and you'll be all right. We can't do any better for you to-night. Go to sleep!"

"Will you hand me my coat, pa? The snow comes in on us too," said one of the boys, from their bed on the floor in the farther corner of the room.

The boys being protected in similar fashion, Felix returned to his bed; and his children, accustomed to discomforts, made no more complaint,

except that now and then a sleepy voice would cry out, "You 're pulling it all off of me! Let me have my share of the quilt!" But this scarcely disturbed their father's slumbers.

Martha, who had not been endowed with the same easy, happy-go-lucky disposition, could not sleep. She was thinking of the state in which things would be found in the morning: everything covered with snow; the children blue, shivering, crying with cold, and contracting dreadful diseases; the baby fretting. She knew too well what it would be like; and all her planning and studying could find no way out of the difficulties of the situation. Sleep overpowered her at last, while she was conning over and over those strange words, "How shall he not also freely give us all things?" "I wish He would help us, *somehow*," she murmured, with a faint hope in that help. Echoing her own words, "Help us somehow!" again and again, with her heart turned toward Him in meek petition, she slipped into unconsciousness, and slept till the dim light, peering in through the cracks about door and windows, told her it was morning.

"Come, Felix! You ought to get up, and get

the boys up, to clear off the snow. Everything is covered; and the beds will be all wet unless it is brushed off clean before the fire is built. I guess it has stopped snowing. It does n't seem to sift in as it did. I shall have to lie still, and keep the baby; and you can put Vinnie and Lottie into this bed, and Rolfe too. They must n't go about in the snow. Dio can help some, I guess."

Felix obeyed his wife's directions; and the necessary sweeping and shoveling and shaking and brushing began, and the snow was rapidly gathered together and turned out-doors.

"I 'm thankful it has stopped snowing," said Martha, as she watched operations from her safe, though crowded quarters in bed. "It is n't so bad as it might be," with a quick remembrance of her hours of anxious thought, and her prayer. They had been helped "somehow," in that the storm was over, and the snow was so light and dry that it could be shaken off readily.

"But we 're burning out all the oil," she continued, her weak faith faltering in view of a new trouble. "There is n't a cupful in the oil-can, and we can't have the windows open such a cold, windy day as this."

"There 's a good fire now, and the room is getting comfortable," said Felix. "I would n't go to worryin' about the oil. It 'll come all right, somehow."

That word "somehow" encouraged Martha again, reminding her of the help she had so lately received. "Do help us, somehow," her heart petitioned again. She was beginning to look up for help in her perplexities and distresses. "'Freely give us all things:' some more oil, and some glass for the window, please, if 't ain't too much to ask you to 'tend to such things."

She felt more cheerful after this prayer. She hoped, she almost believed, that "He that spared not his own Son," would hear and answer her in her distress.

The breakfast being over, Felix rose, and taking down his much-bepatched outside coat, said, "I reckon I better go down to that mill, and see if they won't give me a job. It 's middlin' cold to go out, and middlin' late to start, but the snow ain't deep enough to hurt me, and if I don't never start, I won't never get nothin'."

This sensible conclusion Martha did not contradict. She only replied by saying, "Can't you

take Marvel along? He 's such a trouble in the house. He won't set himself about an earthly thing, but to plague the little ones all day long. Maybe he can get a job and earn a bit too."

"'T would come proper handy if he could; but I 'low you won't hear no such good news. His shoes is most off his feet, but I s'pose he can go. Come along, Marv."

They departed, and those who remained at home went each about the business of the day. Martha washed and dressed the baby; Diodema cleared away the breakfast dishes, and swept the room; Dean and Rolfe took turns at pounding the corn in the rude mortar, which their father had hollowed out of an oak log, for making hominy; and the two little girls amused themselves in the warm corner by the fire.

"Ma," said Dean, in his interval of rest, "I keep thinking of that verse about 'freely give us all things.' May I get the leaf? I want to learn it."

"Yes, get it, and read out loud to me. It ran in my head in the night, and it seemed wonderful comforting," said his mother.

Dean read it, slowly and stumblingly, and then

a second and a third time, and each time more readily, and with a better understanding of its meaning, till his brother interrupted, by saying, —

“Come! you ’ve got to take your turn now; my arms ache!”

As Dean pounded away, he said over and over such parts of the verse as he could remember, his mother putting in a word to help when her memory supplied it; and Vinnie, who was quick to learn, caught it up, and then Rolfe, and so they recited it all together in concert.

“I like it first-rate!” said Dean. “It ’s a nice verse, is n’t it, ma? Do you s’pose we ’ll ever have a whole Testament again?”

“I don’t know how we ’ll ever get one,” said his mother. “If you was only as big and strong as Marvel, or if Marvel only had as much” — she would not say “wit.” She had heard her eldest son called “half-witted,” and it hurt her none the less that it savored of the truth. She would not use that word, so she had changed her sentence, and said, “if he was only as steady and careful as you are he might earn quite a bit, if there were any chances. I ’m afraid there won’t be many down here.”

"Why, mother, there 's the mill!"

"Oh, but everybody that lives about here has just come, and they 're all poor, I reckon; and for every chore there is to do at the mill there 'll be twenty eager to do it. Pa might as well try, but I 'm afraid he won't get any work. I wish he might. I don't see how we 're to get along. But, there! I 'm worrying again, and it ain't no use."

"'Freely give us all things,' you know, ma!" said Dean, looking up from his work with a bright, hopeful glance.

"It has a pretty sound. I hope it means that He does look out for us. It 's a lonesome thing to be away down here, and it would be a comfort to know He was caring."

The short winter day glided by, and the shades of evening gathered. The inmates of the log cabin began to take long looks out at the door in the direction in which they expected the return of their absent ones.

"There 's a man coming on horseback," said Rolfe.

This announcement brought the whole family to the door. It was a rare event when any one passed.

"Stand back. It is n't manners to look so hard," said the mother, as the traveler drew near.

The children drew back, and contented themselves with peeping out at the half-closed door.

"He 's coming here!" — "He 's going to stop!" announced several voices as the stranger drew his rein, and turned his horse toward the door.

He dismounted and stood near the threshold, with one hand on the bridle, while he asked, —

"Can you give me a lodging, and my horse shelter and food? We are both tired and hungry, and are willing to accept any accommodations you can afford us."

"I 'm sorry," Martha began to say, but he interrupted her with a good-natured smile, —

"You may as well say yes at once, for I can't possibly go any farther;" and he dropped the bridle to rub his hands together, to restore some warmth to them. "I 'll put up with anything, and pay for all expense and trouble I make you. I see there 's a straw shed out yonder."

"But we have a large family, and only one room," said Martha.

"But you don't wish a fellow-creature to perish



out here on your bleak prairies! I 'm a stranger in these parts, and it 's getting dark, and the next house may be miles away; and if I should n't lose my way, but should find it, it would most likely be just like this, small, and no accommodations for travelers. You can at least let me lie on the floor before your fire. I 'm used to roughing it, and will ask nothing better."

"But our horse-shed is no account, — all tumbling to pieces. We 've just come here, and have n't any stock, so we did n't fix it up, or even put up a stack of hay."

"May I go out there and see what I can find?" asked the young man.

"Oh, certain! Dean, go with him, and help him if you can."

It proved a poor shelter indeed. There was a straw roof: the walls had all gone for kindling-wood, except on the north side. It was, however, a good deal better than the open prairie; and the stranger tied his horse under it, blanketed him well, and poured some oats, from a bag which he had carried behind his saddle, into the rude manger.

"There, old fellow! That 's the best I can

do for you," he said, patting the animal's shoulder.

"I can get plenty of dry straw for his bed," said Dean. "I 'll pull it out from beneath. Leave it to me. I reckon you 're chilled through. Go in and get warm. I 'll give him such a bed that he can't be cold."

"Thank you. He will appreciate that, I know. I will go in now, for I am benumbed with cold."

The children gazed shyly but admiringly at the stranger as he sat near the fire rubbing his hands and feet alternately. He was well dressed, and a rather handsome young man, with red cheeks and dark bright eyes. The lower part of his face was concealed by a heavy, silky brown beard, but his smile revealed a row of white, even teeth; and the pleasant, even merry look that seemed at home upon his face, attracted the children more strongly than his good looks.

"Why don't you take off your shoes and warm your feet?" asked Rolfe, who was bolder than the rest.

"Oh, they 'll get warm fast enough. They 'll ache if I warm them too fast," said the stranger.

Martha, intent on her supper, which she would

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have liked much to make more tempting had she possessed the means, had little time or thought to bestow upon her guest's appearance. She had not failed to see, in the quick scrutiny she gave him as he crossed her threshold, that he was not a man to be feared. He looked a good young man. That was enough for her. She spread a white cloth upon her rude table, and brought out her two old silver teaspoons and one glass tumbler — cherished treasures that were too precious to be used on common occasions — to adorn it. But she had only the old chipped and cracked earthen dishes, and nothing to put in them but the hominy that had been cooking on the stove all the afternoon.

## CHAPTER IV.

### *A SUNDAY-SCHOOL MAN.*

JUST as they were ready to sit down to supper, Felix and Marvel returned, and Dean came in.

After hearing the stranger's explanation of his presence, Felix gave him a hospitable welcome, and they all sat down together.

"We ought to have some molasses, or milk, or something with this hominy. I reckon you ain't used to quite so plain fare, stranger," Felix began, as he helped him to a plateful.

"I am very hungry, and this tastes good. I did n't know anything made of corn alone could be so good," replied the stranger.

"Where have you come from, and how far might you be a-travelin'?" asked the host, after a few spoonfuls of the warm food had taken the keenest edge from his own hunger.

"I came from Chicago. I expect to go as far south as Baxter Springs," the young man replied.

"Goin' to take up a claim on these prairies

somewhere, I reckon. Or, maybe you 're buying up land for a spec."

"No, I 'm not buying land, nor looking up a claim. I 'm a Sunday-school man. I 've been visiting several places, trying to establish Sunday-schools here and there, wherever there seems to be an opening."

"Sho, now! I ought to have asked you to ask a blessing, had n't I? I did n't take it you was that kind of a man. You can read and pray for us after supper, if you 're a mind to, and that 'll suit my woman fine. She 's a mind to be kind o' religious. Her old granny give her a New Testament just afore she died, and made her promise as how she 'd read it out to us after supper every night, and she 's kep' it up. She had the misfortin to lose her Testament when we was moving down here."

"Ah, that was a pity! So she had to give it up after all!" said the stranger, who, in his keen interest, had stopped eating to listen.

"No; that she did n't! My woman 's got uncommon grit about some things, and she 'll make 'em go if there 's any go to 'em. She managed to get hold of a leaf of an old Testament

that the child'en used to carry to school, and she 's read that over and over ever sence. It 's mighty hard reading for her, — Romans is, — and sometimes I have to give her a lift. I used to be a schoolmaster once't, and the hard words don't stick me. No, sir! the harder they are, the better I like 'em."

"And you, — have n't you a mind to be religious, as well as your wife?" asked the stranger.

"Wall, yes, after a fashion. I like to go to a good rousin' camp-meetin'; stirs a man up, and makes him feel as if somethin' was a-doin'. And I 'm willin' to read for Marthy."

"And you pray with your family after the reading?"

"Wall, no. I don't go in quite so deep as that, and I 'll give ye my reasons. You see, to go in deep is kind o' henderin'. For instance: here we air, jest moved down onto the wild perrarie, not a head of stock, and, I may as well own the truth, not a dollar in money. We fetched corn and things, so we ain't starving poor; but you can see, with half an eye, that a man with a big family has to work when and where he can get work. Now, I 've tramped four

miles down to a saw-mill this cold day, to try if I could n't get a job, and the only chance I could get was next Sunday. They 'll give me a dollar for the day's work. Wall, now, I know workin' of a Sunday ain't the thing for a purfesser, or for anybody that purtends to be right down pious. But my family reely needs that dollar — must have it, I may say. So I don't purtend to go in deep. I can't afford it."

"You believe there is a God, do you not?" asked the stranger.

"In course I do! Do ye take me for a heathen?"

"And that he has given us the Bible?"

"To be sure! And that every word and letter on 't is true," said Felix stoutly.

"Well, then, what does it mean when it says, 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed'?"

"Does it say that?" interrupted Martha. "Why, that 's some like the verse the children learned this afternoon: 'Freely give us all things.' Say it, Dean. My memory is so poor I can't remember it all, yet."

Dean hesitated, and looked at his father, uncer-

tain whether he might speak; as the one point on which Felix's family discipline was rigid, was that when he was talking, his children were to remain silent.

"Out with it, if you can say it, Dean!" said his father; and Dean repeated the verse.

"We thought it a comforting kind of a verse," said Martha; "but we did n't feel sure whether or no it meant such things as folks want every day, and ought to earn for themselves."

"Well, the verse certainly does n't mean that we may be careless and idle, and then the Lord will see that we have the things we need. There are other verses that tell us we must be diligent in business. Do you know the commandments, Dean?"

"Yes; I learned them at school," answered Dean.

"Yes, *sir!*" corrected the father. "Where 's your manners, Dean?"

"Yes, sir," said Dean meekly.

"Well," said the stranger, "is n't there one that says, 'Six days shalt thou labor'?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then don't you think we ought to work and



do our best, and, having done that, trust in the Lord and do good, — which, I take it, means do right, — and we shall be fed?"

"Yes, sir!" said Dean.

"It looks like it meant that, certain!" said his mother.

"Would n't that shut off Sunday work?" asked the stranger turning to Felix.

"Wall, it might, and then agin it might n't," said Felix. "When a man is in my sittiwation, he can't always see his way clear to let a chance slip."

"That means he can't believe God, and trust fully to his promise," said the stranger. "The commandment to keep the Sabbath holy is clear and positive. 'Thou shalt not do any work.' And, mark my words, Mr. Windom, God can make one dollar go as far as two. Yes, I 'd rather have no money at all, with his blessing, than all the wealth in the world without it. 'The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich.'"

"There 's a good reason why they must keep the mill a-goin' seven days in the week," said Felix, after a moment's pause for thought. "It 's a smallish stream, and there is n't water

enough to run it, only when it 's full, so it stan's to reason they want to do all the work they can, them times. And I 'll have to go. I promised to, and I ain't the man to go contrairy to my word. It 's right to keep your promises! Hey, stranger?"

"Oh, I guess they 'd let you off if you told them" —

"They can get hands enough, in course," interrupted Felix. "There 's plenty stands ready to take the job off'n my hands, if they have a chance. But I 've got a holt of it, and I mean to keep a holt. I ain't no sich fool as to let go."

"Maybe you 'd better, Felix," said Martha. "If 't ain't right to do it, you ought to give it up. You see, if it loses us the promise" —

"What promise? How should it lose us the promise?" said Felix impatiently. "I thought you was always for havin' me work, Marthy! I 'm sure, you 're always puttin' me up to do this or that, and now, here you air a-goin' right agin me!"

Martha turned helplessly to the stranger, as if unable to explain herself, and wishing him to speak.

"You 're losing the promise that you shall certainly be fed if you do right. 'Verily thou shalt be fed;' that means certainly."

"You don't need to tell me what the words mean. I had good learning when I was young, and I 've been schoolmaster once't," said Felix with some show of sullenness.

"Excuse me. But perhaps the children do not all know. You see, they are drinking in all we say. They will do as you do probably. If you decide to trust God, and do what is right, they will learn to do the same, and be better men and better women all their lives. On the contrary, if they see that you don't believe strongly enough to forego an immediate advantage in obedience to his plain command, they will be influenced by your decision."

"Wall, I 'll see," said Felix. "I 'll think it over. And now, if you 're done your supper, stranger, we 'll have that little reading and praying over with, 'cause Marthy won't be satisfied with no less."

The stranger took the worn and soiled leaf that had done so good service, and read from it, and then knelt and offered a short prayer. Afterwards

the men went out to look to the comfort of the horse. When they came in again, they found that Martha had converted the living room into two sleeping rooms by means of a calico curtain. The larger division contained the bed which her guest and Felix were to share. Beside it, on the floor, was spread the boys' bed. In the other part she had the trundle-bed arranged for herself and the little girls. She had changed the length for the width, and pieced it out with the little blue chest, covered with a folded rug and an old quilt.

"Our accommodations are poor," she said apologetically. "We used to have three rooms before we moved down here; but we are willing to live anyhow for a while, for the sake of getting a place of our own."

"I hope you will not make yourself uncomfortable on my account," said the stranger. "I had no choice but to stay, though I slept in a chair by the fire; but you seem to have wonderful resources, and have provided beds for all."

The whole of the room being now occupied by beds, there was nothing to be done but to go to rest, and indeed all were weary enough; and Martha had for some time been watching the last

of her oil getting very low in the lamp, and fearing it would not last till they were in bed.

When the stranger was ready to resume his journey in the morning, he offered pay for his lodging, but Felix refused it decidedly.

"We ain't the kind o' folks that wants pay for a little 'commodation o' this sort," said he. "We could n't do very well by ye, but we done the best we could, and you 're welcome to it."

"But I made my bargain with your wife. I said 'I'll pay for the trouble and the expense,' and now I must keep my word," and he offered the money to Martha, who drew back, saying, —

"It's just as he says, sir. You're welcome as far as I'm concerned."

"It hain't the custom of the country, sir. We should feel mighty mean if we took money for a little favor like that. It's kind of agin my conscience as I may say," said Felix loftily.

"And yet your conscience will allow you to use the Lord's day for making money. Is n't that rather inconsistent, my friend? This money is honestly yours."

"Well, maybe 't is, and then agin maybe 't is n't. I can't say. But put it up: I don't want it," said Felix.

"Here is a little book I want to give to Dean. He was very good to my horse," said the stranger, putting a very tiny little volume in Dean's hand. "This," said he, "is a part of the New Testament. It is the book of John."

Dean received it with a look of gratitude and pleasure more eloquent than words.

"That more than pays for your keep," said Martha, no less pleased than her boy. "We 've wanted one right bad."

"I am as glad to give it as you are to receive it. And I will not forget when I get home to send you a paper now and then. Shall we kneel and ask God to bless us all before we part?"

They all knelt, and the stranger remembered each one by name, and prayed in plain, simple words that the youngest could understand. There were tears on Martha's cheeks when she rose.

Then he shook hands with them all, leaving something bright and glittering in little Lottie's palm, over which he closed her fingers. She held it tightly, peeping smilingly between her fingers.

"That 's not accordin' to contrack," remonstrated Felix.

"Oh, it is n't contrary to the custom of the

country to allow a child to take a little money. I know better than that," said the stranger good-humoredly, as he mounted his horse.

"Come again, if you can," said Martha heartily. The invitation was repeated by Felix, and echoed by the children.

"If I ever come this way I certainly will," said the stranger.

They watched him out of sight, and turned from the door reluctantly.

"He 's a good man," said Martha.

"Jest the right sort for a Sunday-school man, or a preacher," responded Felix. "Let me see your money, Lottie!"

Lottie opened her hand, and revealed a silver dollar. "It 's mine! he gave it to me," she said.

"But don't you want pa to take it to town, and buy you a stick of candy with it, — so long?" said he, measuring on his hand.

"Yes; I do," said the child.

"And it will buy oil too, so we shall not have to be in the dark, and some glass to make the window," said Martha. "You 'll like a nice glass window, Lottie?"

"Yes, yes; take it!" said the little one.

An earnest consultation was now held. There were so many more things needed than the dollar would purchase, that it was necessary to choose among them; and some things that seemed indispensable had to be left out. Oil, nails, glass, a little thread for mending the worn garments of the family, a little salt, if possible a little coffee, and alas! certainly a little tobacco; for the head of the family was a slave to this filthy weed, and could not be denied it, even in this extremity, when his wife, with a young babe to nurse, had neither tea nor sugar, milk nor flour.



## CHAPTER V.

## SUNDAY WORK.

FELIX and Marvel set out immediately, the one carrying a basket, and the other the oil-can, on the seven miles' walk to the nearest store. In their absence the children occupied the time bringing coal, pounding hominy, and reading from the little book. The day was quite mild, so the window could be left open. Dean was improving so rapidly in his reading that his mother was glad to leave it to him most of the time, and be a listener. While her hands were busy, she was drinking in eagerly the good words, and trying to understand. The baby, a plump, peaceable little person, who seemed aware that she had come into a family where the luxury of constant tending could not be expected, rarely caused any interruption. She would lie for hours in her cradle wide awake, looking up at the moving forms and faces about her, exercising herself with kicking her feet, and throwing up her arms,

and smiling back for every cheery word or smile bestowed upon her.

Dio could read a little, but she rarely exercised that accomplishment. She seemed scarcely to care to listen, though, in the dearth of other interests, she undoubtedly heard a good deal. But she never asked, as Dean was continually doing, "What does it mean when it says that?"

"I ought to have known my Bible better," said Martha, when unable to reply to one of these questions of her boy. "I had a chance to know, for Granny had a nice big print Bible, and she knew it well from beginning to end. I've heard her say she had read it all through four times; and the Psalms and the New Testament she did n't know how many times. But I was like Dio then, I did n't take much interest."

"I wonder if I'll ever have a whole Bible?" said Dean. "I want to know all God says. I guess when I'm a man, I'll be a Sunday-school man, like Ellsworth Capen."

They had not inquired the stranger's name; but after he was gone they found written in the little book, "Dean Windom, from his friend Ellsworth Capen." So they knew his name.

"You 'll be a man, and can earn money, and buy Bibles or anything you want," said Dio. "I 'm only a girl, and can't do anything I want to. I wish I was a boy!"

"Girls can earn money too," said Dean.

"Not so much as boys," said Dio quickly. "If I was a boy, think I 'd stay cooped up here in a miserable log cabin with no windows, nor anything nice and comfortable? I 'd go off to some city and get work, and then I 'd send ma money to buy a cow and chickens and heaps of things."

This led to the building of a variety of air-castles, which amused the children, and brightened the hours even for their mother.

Though it was late in the evening when Felix and Marvel got home, the window was finished, after they had eaten supper, and set in its place, all ready to let in the morning light; and, with this great addition to their few comforts, they went to bed quite happy.

"He freely gave us the window and the oil I asked for, and some other things that I did n't ask for," reflected Martha, as she lay upon her bed. "I thank him! Now, for certain, Felix must n't go to work on Sunday, if I can help it."

But although Felix had promised to think it over, when Mr. Capen had urged the duty of keeping the Sabbath holy, he had known quite well how he should decide; and before the first faint flush of dawn appeared in the east, he was out of bed; and, disregarding Martha's protests, took a little cold breakfast, and was off to the mill.

Martha wanted to do right, and she wanted her family to do right also; but it must be confessed that it did seem hard that Felix should have to refuse work on the only day of all the week that he could have it. Her faith was very weak as yet, and perhaps her protests were not as hearty as they should have been. Yet she did not forget her visitor's words, "The Lord can make one dollar go as far as two;" and her own experience told her it was true, for some times her husband had earned money when it did his family very little good. He had not, indeed, wasted it in riot and drink. Felix prided himself upon his uprightness in this respect; but he was of a foolishly sanguine temper, and his little learning proved a dangerous thing, for he was often drawn into schemes, the success of which was more than

doubtful from the beginning; and no entreaties or arguments of his wife availed anything when his mind was set upon one of these ventures; for did he not know a good deal more than she? and was not the judgment of a man of his attainments worth more than that of a woman with no learning to speak of?

Martha's protests in this case had not been forcible; partly because she had seen that Felix was determined, and whatever she said would be useless, and partly because her faith was yet so weak that she was not wholly set against his going. But all her Sabbath comfort was destroyed. Her joy in her new window, and in hearing Dean read by its light, was more than half spoiled.

It was a quiet day. The children's prattle did not disturb their mother, so long as they did not quarrel, and they rarely quarreled much when Marvel was not there to tease them.

Marvel, vexed that he had not been awakened to go with his father to the mill, had followed him as soon as breakfast was over. As in his father's case, Martha had made but feeble remonstrance; for, though she had small hope of his earning anything, his absence was a great relief;

and she thought if he was with his father he would come to no harm. She did remind him of the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, adding her conviction that no good would come of working on that day; but he only answered, in his own stubborn way, —

“What pa does, I ’ll do.”

The day was cold, and grew colder. Marvel’s clothes were thin, and he was thoroughly chilled, so that his face was blue and his teeth chattered by the time he got to the mill. There was no chance for him to earn money; but, to keep him quiet, his father allowed him to help him whenever there was a chance. In the afternoon three or four boys, who had been skating on the stream near the mill, came in to warm themselves by the fire that was kept burning in a small room connected with it.

Marvel hailed their appearance with joy. He was not yet acquainted with any boys in the new neighborhood. He gladly accepted their invitation to “Come on!” when they were ready to start out again.

One of them good-naturedly lent his skates to Marvel for a while; and he was in the full tide of

enjoyment, when suddenly he broke through the ice. He laughed at the accident, for the water was shallow, and he had only wet one of his feet. He went on with his amusement, sliding about, when he had no skates, till, overcome with the cold, the boys gave up the sport and went home. Then he returned to the mill.

"My foot feels as if it was most froze," said he, as he sat down by the fire to warm his chilled limbs. "I declare I b'lieve 't is froze."

There was no one to talk to, as his father was still at work in the mill, but that did not hinder Marvel from talking.

"'T is froze, sure! 'T won't do to let pa know of that. He 'll scold 'cause I did n't come in soon as I got it wet. What 'll I do? Thaw it out, I reckon. I know it 'll ache fearful!"

Nevertheless, knowing no better thing to do, he took off his shoes and put his feet to the fire. Soon they did begin to "ache fearful." He bore it as long as he could, but his fortitude was not great, and his groans and cries at length reached his father's ears. He came and looked in.

"What ails ye, Marv? Froze your feet? Jest like you! Why did n't ye come in sooner? Now we 'll have a purty time! Let me look at it."

The poor rag of a stocking was drawn off and the foot examined.

"My! Won't you have a time! What did ye put yer foot to the fire fur? Did n't ye know better 'n that? No use a-screechin'. Why did n't ye stay to home where yer belonged? Both of 'em is froze some, I reckon, but that one 's bad. If ye ever get home yer 'll be glad to stay there, I reckon. Oh, dear! Such luck as we 're always a havin'!"

As the daylight declined, Martha made her usual preparations for supper, and the home-coming of the absent ones, and then waited and watched for their appearance. She had not to wait long before she saw a horse and wagon coming, and recognized her husband and son among those who rode.

"He got a ride home. That was a stroke of luck. Folks don't pass here very often," she remarked to her children.

But she was soon undeceived, and realized that instead of a "stroke of luck," it had been a misfortune that had made it necessary for Felix to find somebody to bring Marvel home.

"I was afraid no good would come of Sunday



work," she said. "I've kept thinking all day how that the Lord said, 'Verily thou shalt be fed,' and how that we could n't trust him, but must work on his day; and now, here's Marvie laid up for nobody knows how long, and maybe a doctor to pay."

"'T ain't my fault! If he'd had half-wit he'd a-know'd he would freeze his feet after he got 'em wet. You always lay every blamed thing onto me. Jest as if I was n't trying with all my might, — getting up before daylight, and off in the dark and cold to work! What did you let Marv come for, anyhow? I did n't want him, and I took special pains not to wake him when I got up."

Martha had nothing to say in reply. Sadly she went about, getting together such bandages and remedies as she could command, and in silence she bound up the aching feet. Marvel was not silent during the process. His groans were varied with howls, which his father's stern commands could not repress. As soon as he had been made as comfortable as circumstances allowed, he threw himself across his mother's bed, and, spite of pain, was soon in a heavy sleep, being wholly

exhausted by the fright and excitement and pain of the last two hours.

“‘The Lord can make one dollar go as far as two,’ that man said,” Martha remarked musingly, when the noise and confusion were succeeded by quiet, and they were able to sit down to their long-delayed meal. “I should think he could that! If we ’d been a Sabbath-keeping family, all sitting round the fire reading our Bible this afternoon, this would n’t have happened. I ’ve learned one lesson that I reckon I won’t forget very soon; and, as far as I have my way, the Sabbath is going to be kept, after this, in this house, let come what will.”

Felix attended diligently to his supper, letting his wife’s remarks pass unheeded. He knew she was in the right, and was half inclined to make up his mind to “go in deep,” as he called it, and join hands with her in saying, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” But only half; as usual he put off the decision to some other time

## CHAPTER VI.

## CONVALESCENCE.

WEARY weeks dragged their uncomfortable length along. The weather was cold and blustering, so that the children were almost wholly confined to the house, and it was full and noisy, inevitably. Marvel, who had been forced to surrender three of his toes as the penalty of his folly, took cold after the amputation, and came near enough to surrendering life itself to cause his mother keen anxiety, and make a great deal of care necessary. As he grew better he became peevish, exacting, and fretful. He had been a most trying child when well; noisy, obstinate, and always stirring up strife. Sickness had but developed a few other disagreeable qualities.

His constant cry, "Ma, ma!" at all hours of the day and night, except while she stood at his very bedside ministering to him, was a weariness. Sometimes she had scarcely returned to her bed in the middle of the night, before it was heard

again; and if she did not at once respond, it was kept up till every one was awake and grumbling. Felix often threatened the exasperating invalid with a whipping; but his mother would not have her sick boy punished, and she was very gentle and patient with him.

It was a great trial to her that she could not provide him with better food. Felix had now and then a day's work at the mill, though he worked no more on Sundays. But the doctor had to be paid, and medicines bought, and luxuries were beyond their reach, even for the invalid. There was, in truth, but little need. Marvel's appetite needed no tempting. The doctor had ordered a light diet. He must not be fed too much, nor too often. But no sooner was one portion of food disposed of, than he was begging and crying for another.

"You 're starvin' mé to death!" he would say. "I 'd give a thousand worlds full o' gold dollars for a little piece o' bread. Give me a little, — jest one crumb, to keep me from starvin'. Ye won't? Ye don't care if I do die! Look at my hands, how thin they are! That 's cause I 'm starved."

Hour after hour, day and night, he kept up this talk, with little variation, till it became wearisome in the extreme. Sometimes he would add to his declaration that he was starving and dying, "There! I 'm dead!" And then, in a pathetic undertone, "If ye 'd given me jest one crumb o' bread, I should n't ha' died."

One pleasant thing occurred in those dreary days, that lightened Martha's burden a little; not only by giving employment to the children, and keeping them quiet many an hour, but by reminding her of what she sometimes almost forgot, that God was caring; that he would help, and bring light out of darkness, good out of evil, at last. A package, — two packages, in fact, — came to them through the mail. One, addressed to Mrs. Martha Windom, proved to be a Bible — a whole Bible! Martha looked upon it as a mine of wealth for herself, and for her children, by and by, when she could find time to read it. For the present, she could only snatch a morsel now and then to think over while about her work.

The other package was directed to Dean Windom, and contained a roll of papers for young folks. Some were religious, and some secular,

but all full of good, bright, and useful reading, and delightful pictures. Dean had never seen but one such paper in his life, and that he had fairly worn out with reading; and many a time he had given his mother a chance to rest a little, while Marvel was sleeping, by telling and re-telling to the little ones the stories from that paper.

The assurance that Mr. Capen had not forgotten them when far away, they knew not where, cheered them greatly. That he should take the pains to send them these treasures was as gratifying as it was wonderful. If that good man could have known how dark was the night into which he sent this little bit of sunshine, how much of hope and cheer and inspiration to well-doing it brought, he would not have thought his labor and expense ill bestowed.

The worst of times will pass, and Marvel at last got so he could rise and sit at table, and eat what he wished. Martha took the opportunity while he was still confined to the house, to teach him what she could of Bible truth, and try to lead him to believe in, and love and obey his Father in heaven. But Marvel was as intractable in this as in other things. He would listen

sometimes with interest to accounts of the creation, the flood, and to Bible stories, but his heart was untouched.

"Did God make cold and ice and snow?" he asked one day.

"Yes; God made everything," replied his mother.

"Cold made my foot get froze. God made cold. I don't like God. Won't never like him. He froze my foot," said Marvel.

"No," said his mother firmly. "Marvel, you was to blame yourself for your frozen foot. You got it wet, and then stayed out in the cold. You was the one to blame."

"No," said Marvel obstinately. "God froze my foot. Won't never like God."

Martha tried at different times to change this feeling; but it seemed as if the boy had found an excuse for his perverseness that satisfied him, and he could not be moved.

## CHAPTER VII.

## DEATH.

FEBRUARY came, and the roof had not yet been repaired. The poles that had been procured for that purpose still lay on the ground at one end of the cabin, and the snows had covered them, and melted away, and re-covered them; but every day when it was sufficiently mild to allow the work to be done, Felix had some excellent reason why he could not do it. Dean's poor patching had answered a purpose, and they had not suffered greatly.

"To-morrer I 'll do that roof," he said one afternoon, when the weather was rapidly moderating. "I 'd do it to-night, but it 's so late I don't know as I 'd get it quite done. I 'll do it to-morrer, sure."

But in the night, rain began to fall; and before Martha perceived it, for she slept heavily, the bed was quite wet. Martha took a severe cold, and, exhausted as she was by the long weeks of watch-



ing and waking, labor and anxiety, she succumbed at once. Pneumonia was developed, and the doctor came only to tell the dismayed family that it was too late. Nothing could save her.

Though she had not been told, Martha felt that death was near. Dean, who sat day and night at her pillow, with the baby in his arms, or in the cradle at his feet, received her last charges.

"You 'll do the best you can for the children, won't you, Dean? I don't see how it can be all right for me to go and leave them. I can't see how you 'll do without me. But God knows. He would n't let it be so if it was n't all right. I want you to believe in him always, Dean, and do what the Book says, even when it 's hard, for it 'll turn out all right in the end. And keep up that reading, sonny. It 's been a benefit. It 's been a wonderful benefit. Read every evening. If pa won't do it, you do it."

At one time she murmured, "'Father of the fatherless.' I 've seen that in the Book. It must mean of the motherless just as much, for mothers care a heap more 'n fathers. I 'll trust Him."

"Dio, you 'll help Dean all you can, won't

you? Take care of the little ones. Take care of the poor baby, — bless her! She must have a name. Perhaps, Felix, you 'll call her Marthy. We never named one after me, and if I 'm a-going" —

"To be sure, we 'll call her Marthy. She 'd ought to have had a name long ago. But you ain't a-goin'! You 'll get over this. We 'll have another doctor. I doubt whether or no this one knows much."

"It 's no use, Felix. I know, myself. I don't need any doctor to tell me I 'm going. I ain't afraid; but, oh! how can I leave them all? Do take care of them, Felix, the best you can."

"Why, in course I will! Ain't I their father? Don't fret, Marthy."

"'He that spared not his own Son — he ' — say it, Dean," said she feebly and falteringly.

Dean repeated the verse. "'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'"

"'How shall he not,' — that means, in course he will. Don't ever forget that verse, Dean. Romans is hard reading; but that 's a wonderful comforting verse."

"Marvie, dear, won't you love God? He loves you, and he 's good — so good to us poor sinners. Don't stand out against him like he was your enemy."

Marvel, seated on a stool, with his feet resting across a chair, was whittling a stick. He sat in this attitude a good deal of the time, partly because his feet were warmer when raised from the floor, and he felt the cold very much. He looked indifferently at his mother's appealing face, and maintained an obstinate silence. "Won't you, Marvie?" she besought him again, as if she could not be denied. But she won no reply.

Sadly she turned her head upon her pillow. "Freely give us all things, — freely give," Marvie," she murmured; and her eyes closed gently, and an expression of peace stole over her face, and then settled into a solemn quietness that lasted long.

"She 's asleep!" whispered Dio, holding up her hand to enjoin silence. "Don't wake her. If she sleeps a while maybe she 'll wake better."

They went about with hushed voices. Dean jogged the cradle with his foot, that the baby's nap might continue, and even Marvel's face grew

gentler, and he did not once raise his loud, rude voice.

"She sleeps longer than common," said Felix at length, tiptoeing over to the back side of the bed to look at her face. "Marthy, Marthy! wake. Why, Marthy!" He turned her head on the pillow. He took up one hand and felt it, and then the other. He laid his hand on her heart, and then he sat down on the side of the bed, buried his face in his hands, and sobbed aloud.

The children, not slow to understand the mystery, crowded around him and wept too. The wail of sorrow filled the cabin. Marvel's voice rose above all the rest. His cries of "Ma! ma!" were most pitiful to hear.

Death seldom comes to a home more destitute of all needful things than was the home of the Windoms. Felix left his children weeping around the bed, while he went for a neighbor to come to their assistance. John Faxon lived too far away, but there was a house about a mile distant, westward, where lived a family named Williams. Toward this house he bent his steps.

Left alone with their dead mother, the children cried more bitterly, and clung to Dean and Dio;

the baby wakened, and set up her shrill cry, to swell the chorus. Half stupefied with sorrow, Dean had but wept with the rest; but the baby's voice aroused him to a sense of the necessity of self-control. His mother had left the children in his care. He must try to console and quiet them.

"Dio, do help me get Lottie and Rolfe to be still. It frightens the baby to hear them cry so. Marvel you must be still, or you 'll scare the baby to death. Baby want some dinner?"

He ran to get some food for her. They had no milk, and her food, since her mother's illness, had been crackers, soaked in warm water to a pulpy mess, and sweetened a little; and this she sucked out of a spoon. She seemed one of those fortunate little beings who can live and thrive upon almost any fare, and was soon taking this contentedly.

Marvel, who had but little strength, had become so exhausted that he was willing to obey Dean's injunction, and hobbled to his couch in the corner, stretched himself upon it, and, burying his face in his pillow, sobbed himself asleep. Having taken her food, little Martha was so bright and full of play that the younger ones were amused, and half

forgot for a little while the sorrow that had befallen them.

Presently the door opened, and a large, strong woman came in, followed by a young girl. This was Mrs. Williams and her daughter Carrie. They took the chairs that Dio offered them, and sat resting, the silence being broken only by an occasional audible sigh from the woman, as she looked round upon the little group about her, and once by her exclamation, —

“Poor motherless creturs!”

This silence was oppressive to the little ones. They were filled with awe of the silent stranger, and they began to realize again, to its full extent, the misery that had lifted its weight from their spirits for a few moments; their tears began to flow afresh.

“Poor things! No wonder you cry! ’T would be strange if you did n’t,” said she. “Well, we must make the best of what ’s got to be. Have you got any curtain, or anything you could use to divide off this room?” addressing Dio.

Dio brought such material as she could find, and several other things that Mrs. Williams asked for, and helped to put up the curtain; after which

the two strangers disappeared behind it, and were seen no more for some time.

The children sat in sorrowful silence, wondering much what could be going on in the curtained room, but rather relieved by the absence of the stranger; for her heavy sighs and mournful face had not made the burden on their hearts lighter. At last Dio was called, and was absent from their sight a little while. Lottie began to cry aloud. Vinnie sobbed again, and it was dreadfully lonely in the kitchen till she came back.

"What are they doing?" asked Dean, in a whisper.

"Only fixing poor ma up right clean in her best things, and making the bed nice and smooth," said Dio.

This simple explanation brought great relief. They had feared they knew not what. They were unfamiliar with death, and the sad necessities it brings, but they had vague ideas, scarcely less painful than the reality.

"You can come and look at your ma now, if you would like to," said Mrs. Williams, in a very solemn and impressive manner, holding the curtain aside so that they could look in upon the bed.

They drew near timidly, and peeped over each other's shoulders, as if they could summon courage to look only by clinging close together. What they saw was all very unnatural, unlife-like. The bed, draped in a white sheet, instead of the dark patchwork quilt to which they were accustomed, the stiff, straight form lying there with upturned face and folded hands, seemed strange and awful. Lottie cried aloud, more from terror than grief this time.

Mrs. Williams put down the curtain, and made an honest effort to soothe the child, but it was evident that she had no great ability in this line. Whatever kindness may have been in her heart, it did not show itself in her manner. Her daughter was shy and constrained, and scarcely spoke at all. Lottie could only be appeased by a place in Dean's lap. So he gave the baby to Dio, and held her close in his arms till she ceased her sobbing and at last fell asleep.

Mrs. Williams was to stay with the children till their father returned. She was a good woman, and really felt kindly toward the poor orphans. She began to tell them of heaven, where she believed their mother had gone.



"Your pa tells me she loved her Bible, and tried hard to do right, even when the right way was n't the easy way, so I make no doubt she 's got there. You must be good children, and then when you die you 'll see her, and be with her again."

This was not altogether new teaching, but it came to the children with new interest now. Heaven had seemed a very far off and indefinite place. But now that their mother was there, it was different.

"I wish you would tell us all you know about heaven — every little bit of a thing," said Dean.

"Well, it 's in the Bible that there 's no night there. They need no candle nor the light of the sun. Then there 's no scorching hot days, and no cold winter storms. I reckon it 's all the time like the very pleasantest day you ever saw, only nicer yet."

"Oh, tell more!" — as Mrs. Williams seemed to have come to an end of her description. She was pleased with her success in interesting them, and racked her brain for more recollections of Scripture.

"They sing, and every one has a gold harp to

play on, and a gold crown to wear. I don't reckon they need any teaching, to know how to play them harps. It just comes natural like singing, I take it, though I don't know as I can give Scripture for that. And they go dressed in white, every day."

"Aprons?" asked Dio.

"Well, no; more like dresses, I reckon," replied Mrs. Williams. "It says robes. That means clothes of some kind."

"I always wanted a white dress," said Dio. "I never had one since I was a baby. Ma said I had one then. But this baby never had nothing but calico."

At this point Felix opened the door and came in, interrupting the conversation.

"Well, you get on fine with the children, I see," said he.

"I would stay longer," she replied, "but it's most night now, and Mr. Williams away, and I have to be home. I would take the baby home with me, only she seems some shy of strangers, and I don't know but she'd cry."

"Oh, she would," said Dean earnestly. He had no mind to part with the baby. It would be

too lonesome in the house without her. "Don't, pa, send the baby away."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Williams, not over anxious for the charge. "I only spoke of it because I did n't know as you 'd think you could get along with such a little baby. But Dio is a big girl, and you seem proper handy with her for a boy; and seeing she 's some shy of strangers, maybe 't would n't be best on the whole."

"I reckon we 'll get along with her," said Felix. "She 's a mighty peaceable little thing."

As Mrs. Williams was just going, Dean pressed up to her side, saying, —

"Will you tell me one thing more? Where is it in the Bible that it tells about heaven?"

"Oh, in the last part. Revelation mostly," she replied, as she and her silent daughter hurried away.

Soon after, Marvel, who had been sleeping through the whole of her stay, awoke and fretted for his supper. Dio hurried to get it ready, and the bereaved family drew about the table. The meal was eaten in silence almost unbroken. The younger ones were tired and sleepy, and all were sad and weary.

Dean, as usual, brought his Testament when the meal was finished.

"Yes, yes, read the Book to us, Dean," said his father. "She liked it so, and we 'll try to keep up to her ways, won't we, children? Poor Marthy! how she did keep up the reading to be sure, when she had n't but the one leaf to read out 'n," and he drew his sleeve across his eyes.

Dean found his place and read the chapter. All the time he was reading, a struggle was going on in the father's mind.

"If I 'm ever a-goin' in deep for religion, now 's the time, and I ought to pray after the readin', sure!" was the thought conscience was pressing upon him. "It would please Marthy uncommon if I should."

Dean closed the book.

"Maybe some other time I will," was the decision, in the minute that was left for deciding before the children rose and left the table.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MARVEL'S CHANGE.

JOHN FAXON came next day and made the coffin. It was too cold to work out-doors, so there was no alternative but to make it in the cabin. The sound of saw and hammer and plane were heard there most of the day. The children stood around watching, interested in every stroke; for so monotonous were their lives, that even the making of their mother's coffin was not without an element of pleasurable excitement. Dean alone was excepted, for the baby, terrified at the stranger, and the noise he made, cried so much that he was obliged to stay with her in the curtained inclosure beside his dead mother. There was nothing about that cold, still form that seemed to him like the dear mother he had known. There was small comfort in looking at it.

He got his Testament, and over the baby's shoulder, whenever she would allow him a mo-

ment's respite from talking to and soothing her, he tried to find the chapters in Revelation that told about heaven. He read the last two chapters all through with deep interest.

"I can't understand it all," he said with a sigh, "but there are wonderful pleasant things in it. I wonder if ma has seen those twelve gates yet. Oh, I wonder if — why, yes, I do believe she has seen Jesus already!"

A strange yearning took possession of him, and led him to go and turn down the sheet, and look again upon the dead face; but the solemn, fixed expression chilled his heart, and he covered it hastily. The baby had fallen asleep at last, and he ventured to carry her out and lay her in the cradle; and, as she did not wake, he sat beside her watching the advancing work with the rest.

Marvel had been quite gleeful since the sawing and hammering began. He had hobbled about the carpenter, so eager to help that he became troublesome; and John Faxon, who was a rude, uncultured fellow, spoke roughly to him.

"You seem in a mighty hurry to get your mar's coffin made, 'pears to me. I sh'd think you 'd have some nateral feelin's. Don't yer know when

yer ma is put inter this here box, and kerried off, and put in the ground, she won't never come back no more?"

Marvel turned white. His under jaw fell, and he stood with open mouth, speechless, looking at the brutal speaker. Not till this moment had he realized the whole painful truth. There was a minute of dead silence; for John, rough as he was, perceived what a terrible shock he had given the poor child, and stopped his work in a spasm of regret.

Dean hurried to his side, and putting an arm round his neck, said softly, "Ma's gone to heaven, Marvel, and heaven is a beautiful place."

Marvel appeared to hear nothing, to see nothing, though his eyes were still on John Faxon's face. The silence was broken at last by a cry so loud and bitter in its anguish, that the carpenter was fain to put his hands to his ears, his pity changing to anger at the hideous sound. But it had been far easier to awaken Marvel's grief than it was to allay it. For a while it found expression in cries and howls that were scarcely human in their character. Then, as his strength began to fail, these were succeeded by a low wailing,

scarcely less trying to hear. Then words were intermingled, of which not much was distinguishable but "Ma, ma! O ma, ma, ma!"

John Faxon was glad to get through with his work, and get out of the house.

Felix had been absent most of the day, digging a grave for his wife. He returned just as the carpenter was leaving. In obedience to his stern commands, Marvel hushed his cries, and hiding his face in his pillow, as usual, sought solace in sleep. But even here his grief broke out afresh now and again, and defied all authority to check its expression for a while. He ate no supper, which was a strange thing to be told of Marvel.

As the time of the funeral drew near next day, the neighbors from a radius of four or five miles began to come, till the cabin was full. Many who had never taken the trouble to prove themselves friendly by a neighborly call, came now to see the poor woman buried. There was no minister to preach a funeral sermon; but an aged Christian neighbor read a portion of Scripture, and prayed beside the coffin, and spoke kindly to the bereaved ones of the home to which the dear one had gone.

Marvel had been reasonably quiet during the



exercises, though at times his low, sorrowful cry was heard for a few minutes, before his father, who sat beside him, could check it. But when the coffin was taken up to be carried out, his grief broke over all restraint. He cried "Ma, ma! O ma! I will be good! I will love God! I would n't say it when you wanted me to, but I will do anything! jest whatever you want, ma, only don't — don't go away, and never come back no more!

"You sha'n't carry my ma away, and bury her in the ground! You sha'n't! It's cold! awful cold, out-doors!" and he shuddered heavily, and threw himself across the coffin in a vain attempt to hold it from the bearers, who stood around waiting to perform their office.

There was no quieting him; and it was necessary to carry away the coffin amid all his crying, and his despair at the removal was a piteous sight. He threw himself upon the floor, he cared not where, buried his face in his arms, and wailed till exhaustion hushed his cries, and sleep overcame him.

Dean, who remained at home to comfort him, if possible, having been unable to get his brother

to listen to a word, sat down beside him on the floor, while tears flowed freely down his cheeks. He had never felt any love for Marvel — a big, ugly fellow, who had teased and tormented him from his earliest remembrance. But now a brotherly tenderness sprang up in his heart, and a feeling somewhat akin to that of the mother-care, a solicitude for him in his mental weakness, was born of that hour; and he stroked the rough head and the clammy brown hand beside him almost as tenderly as she would have done.

When Marvel's heavy, sonorous breathing told that for the present his sorrow was lost in unconsciousness, Dean brought a pillow, and, lifting his brother's head, crowded it under as best he could. He failed altogether in making him comfortable, for Marvel moved away from it directly; but the attempted kindness expressed and fanned the new feeling of affection.

In the days that succeeded the funeral it was plain that Marvel was changed. He was quiet and melancholy. He did not tease the younger children. Sometimes, when tired, he was exceedingly restless and fretful; but he kneeled every night with Dean beside his bed, and remained on

his knees till his brother arose. This was a thing he had steadily refused to do while his mother lived.

One day he said to Dean, "I 'm goin' to read. Ma wanted me to learn, and I would n't. Now I will. Gimme your little Testament book."

Dean brought it. He always kept it carefully wrapped in a bit of clean cloth. It was not soiled or injured in the least. He took off the wrapper and put it in Marvel's hand.

Marvel could scarcely read at all. He had forgotten most of the little he ever learned. With a good deal of help from Dean, he spelled out two or three verses, and then, in a sudden fit of impatience because he did not get on better, threw the book as far as he could, exclaiming, —

"I can't read! I hate readin'!"

Dean flew after his book, which had landed in the water-pail. Fortunately it was nearly empty, and it was not much wet. He wiped the covers tenderly.

"Marv! You are bad! How could you do that to my little book?" he said severely.

"I ain't bad! Water won't hurt it none!" said Marvel carelessly. "Make it cleaner," and

he grinned foolishly. Marvel very rarely laughed out like other boys.

"It was bad to treat God's book so. I sha'n't let you take it any more," said Dean.

"God's book?" said Marvel inquiringly. "It's your book."

"The Bible is God's book, because he made it, and gave it to folks, — oh, long ago, I expect. This is a little bit of the Bible — not the whole of it. So it is a part of God's book, is n't it?"

"Don't know! Did n't think of that. Reckon I am bad. I promised to love God. Give me the book again. I'll read a bit more, and I won't throw it, sure."

"No," said Dean. "It's wet now. It must get all dry before it's used any more."

"'Tain't wet. There was n't any water in the pail hardly," said Marvel obstinately. "Give it to me, I say."

"No," said Dean firmly. "Not till it's dry. I'll read a little to you out of ma's Bible, if you want me to. You can understand it better if I read to you."

But Marvel was out of temper, and he stormed and threatened. Then he fretted and whined.

Finally he threw himself on the bed and lay with his face turned to the wall, till Dean thought and hoped he was asleep. When Marvel fell asleep in the daytime, he usually slept several hours; so Dean promised himself a long, quiet time for reading. The weather had changed, and was mild and pleasant, so that every child who had anything in the shape of shoes was out-doors. Rolfe was shoeless, and he had had a chill that morning. So he sat quiet in the corner listening to the reading.

Rolfe was a thoughtful child. More sickness had fallen to his lot than to any of the others. He scarcely knew his letters; but he liked stories, and Dean was reading of Peter's deliverance from prison by the angel.

"If I'd a been Rhoda, I'd have opened the door right away, and said, 'Come in quick, Peter, 'fore they get you again,' " said Rolfe.

"They could n't get him again," said Dean.

"Why not?" asked Rolfe.

"Why, if the Lord sent an angel to let him out, and did n't let the soldiers catch him as he went by, do you 'spose he 'd let them catch him before he got home?"

"I don't hardly 'spect he would," said Rolfe. "But I 'd have let him in right away, any how."

"So would I!" said a voice from the bed, and a shaggy head was raised to look round upon them.

"Ho! you been awake all this time?" said Rolfe. "How 'd you manage to keep so still?"

"Let me take ma's Bible. I 'll read, and I won't throw it, sure."

Dean gave the book into his hands, saying, "Hold it careful; and don't try to read but a verse or two, and then rest. You 'll get on, if you do a little every day."

Marvel was rarely willing to take advice from his younger brother; but a better mood had prevailed, and he held the book with care, turning the leaves as if in search of something. "There 's such a lot of it, and the readin's so thick together a feller can't find nothin'," said he. "You find ma's verse for me. That one she thought such a heap of."

Dean was at no loss to understand. He had a mark at that place. He pointed out the verse with his finger, and Marvel slowly read it aloud. When he had finished he gave back the book and

lay down again. By and by he said gloomily, "‘Freely give us all things,’ don’t mean he ’ll give me back my toes, I reckon. ’Spect I ’ve got to be a poor lame feller."

"I know a verse about that! I can’t say it, but I can find it," said Dean cheerily, turning the leaves with eager haste. "Ma found it first, and ’t was a heap of comfort to her when she felt bad about your toes."

"Did she feel bad?" said Marvel.

"Yes, indeed! She cried," said Dean. "Here ’s the verse. See! She put a bit of the baby’s pink dress in to mark the place."

Marvel stretched himself off the side of the bed, which he had not yet left, and looked with interest at the mark his mother had left in the book. "Read it out," he said.

Dean read, "‘For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.’ Ma said that showed as how there must be a good reason when he lets trouble come. She said he could see how everything was going to be in our lives, and if he sees that you could get on better without your toes" —

"I could n’t! — how better without my toes?"

said Marvel impatiently. "I don't like it! I want to run fast."

"I don't know how. Ma did n't know how, either. But the verse gave her a heap of comfort, she said."

"Read it again," demanded Marvel.

Dean read it again, and then again.

"Not willingly 'flict," repeated Marvel. "'Flict means hurt, I reckon. But I don't understand it. Only I promised to love God."

This promise seemed to settle, for Marvel, all question of submission to God's will. His feeble intellect had grasped this truth — that love to God means obedience, submission, trust. He felt that he had been bad. Henceforth he was bound by his promise to be good. But it was only in trying to be good that he learned how bad he was. The ugly, contrary spirit was constantly uprising. This, and teasing the children, were the sins he daily and hourly had to contend with.

"I am bad! — a heap bad," he would say after some fresh outbreak of the old naughtiness.

One point in which he was entirely changed was the frankness with which he declared his purpose to be good. Formerly he had seemed



ashamed of nothing so much as any good impulses. Now the presence of his father, or even of strangers, did not prevent the utterance of that one sentence that settled everything on the right side, when he was tempted to evil. "I promised to love God." It seemed as if there was no doubt that Marvel's heart was fully set to obey God.

And, because of this, a new relation was beginning to be established between him and Dean — a fraternal relation. They were brothers, but they had not been brotherly. Marvel had been, to Dean, a bully, overbearing, menacing, oppressing, by reason of superior strength of body; Dean's attitude had been that of dislike and avoidance. They had had nothing in common. Now the new growth of soul in each was drawing them together. They had become brothers in Christ Jesus.

Yet they still had their difficulties, as brothers will. Dean's mental superiority fitted him to lead and direct. Marvel's false pride, which was not to be conquered soon or easily, made it hard to take the advice and follow the directions of his younger brother. That he did so, even with frequent lapses, told of a radical change.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A GARDEN.

DIO was becoming more and more the companion and assistant of her father out-of-doors. She was strong and hardy, and liked much better to be working in the woods, at the coal-bank, or walking the seven miles to the store, than to be indoors doing housework. She would have gone with him to the mill; but the father saw fit to draw the line here, and would not permit it. He protested sometimes when she joined him on other occasions, but not too strongly; for he enjoyed the company of his bold, strong, wide-awake girl. And though he often told her she would look much better tending the baby, and doing the housework, he realized that the little Martha would thrive better under Dean's care than under hers.

Dean was so watchful and so wise in managing the little one, that though she rarely had anything but her graham gruel to eat, she had

never yet had a sick day. Her cheeks were round and rosy, and her bead-like black eyes shone with health and roguishness.

As for the effect this changing of duties was to have upon the characters of his twin boy and girl, Felix gave little thought to that. It had never been his way to trouble himself over much about the future. Dean kept the simple household machinery running with tolerable smoothness, with what help he could get from the younger ones, till the time came when a wash-day could no longer be put off. Then, after repeated urgings, Felix stayed at home for a day: the big brass kettle filled with water was hung in the old stone fireplace, the stove being moved aside for the time, and a roaring brush fire kept under it, and they had a grand wash, with clouds of steam, and a deal of commotion in the cabin. It was a gala day to the little ones, notwithstanding the fact that they were confined to the bed, so that all their clothing might be washed; and when the clouds of steam rose up and filled the room, and shut them in, there was laughter and riot enough.

It was a wonder that little Martha did not take

cold in all the dampness and chill, for the door was open much of the time; but she seemed fitted for her lot by a vigorous constitution, that defied ordinary exposure. Her gleeful shouts mingled with those of the others, and gave zest to their fun.

The spring promised to be an early one, and Dean began to think anxiously about a garden. That had always been his mother's care; for Felix's ideas and plans were far too magnificent to condescend to take much interest in so small an affair as a garden, except that, as a concession to the weakness and urgency of woman, he sometimes helped to prepare the ground by plowing, if he could get the loan of a neighbor's horse; otherwise, by turning over the ground with a spade, which he generally could borrow.

There was a piece of ground behind the house that had once been broken up and cultivated, though, from long neglect, it now differed little from the unbroken prairie. This piece of ground Dean's heart was set on converting into a garden. There were in the house a few carefully preserved packages of seed, and Dean was eager to begin operations. He began to urge the matter of plowing.

"I 've got Faxon's promise that he' ll break up an acre for me, for every three days' work I do for him; and we 'll have eight or ten acres of corn, and some potatoes and sorghum. How 'll you like that? sorghum to eat on your cakes next winter, and potatoes a plenty! And I 'll put in some pumkins and watermelons, — heaps of 'em! How 'll you like that? But I can't be fussin' with gardins."

"But, pa," urged Dean, "we 'll be so glad of some beans, or a little early corn in the summer. And some onions! You like onions and cabbages. Ma saved the seed so careful!"

"Wall, when I get time. Ground 's too cold yet, I reckon."

This little dialogue was rehearsed so many times that Dean, seeing that the time for planting was fully come, grew disheartened.

"We sha'n't have any garden at all," he cried with bitterness, as he saw his father walk away one fine morning; not to the mill, for there was no work there for him, nor to Mr. Faxon's, but to the store around which a village was growing, and where there were generally a few idle loungers to listen to Felix's stories.



The Garden.

THE  
NEW  
YORK  
LIBRARY  
OF  
THE  
MUSEUM  
OF  
ART  
AND  
DESIGN

"Reckon I could dig some," said Marvel, who had now recovered his strength, but of whom not much work had yet been expected.

"So can I," said Dio, who had not been allowed to go with her father. "Let 's set to and make the garden ourselves. It 'll be a shame not to have any. I want to plant my marigolds."

They at once armed themselves with every implement that could by any possibility be used to dig up the soil. Marvel took the fire-shovel; Dio, an old hoe that had seen hard service, and was dulled and blunted and worn off at the corners; Dean, the remains of a barn-shovel, weak in the back, and broken in the handle; Rolfe could find nothing more serviceable than a large iron spoon. The baby and Lottie were to be Vinnie's charge, though she had no idea of remaining in the house with them; but, putting an old hood on the little Martha's head, tugged her about while she watched the operations of the others, and little Lottie followed close at her heels.

The sod was almost as tough and hard as if it had never been broken up. Marvel was too much like his father to enjoy hard work; and the long



interval of inaction had made his muscles soft, and he was soon tired. Dio worked vigorously, but to little purpose; and Dean, brave and earnest as he was, soon exhausted his small degree of strength. And the amount they had accomplished, when at the end of half an hour of hard work they stopped to rest and wipe the perspiration from their faces, was ludicrously small.

"We never can do it!" said Dio.

"It's got to be plowed, sure!" said Dean.

"Got to be plowed, sure!" gasped Marvel.

"Lemme get my breath, and I'll go and get John Faxon."

"Oh, you can't get him! He won't come," said Dio, feasting on ladies' sorrel as she lay reclining on the ground. "I don't see what we are going to do. If I had a spade that would dig I could do it, but there's nobody hereabouts to borrow of."

"I'll go for John. He's boun' fur to come!" persisted Marvel. "Got to be plowed, this has!"

"I would n't go," said Dean wearily. "It's a long tramp over there, and he just won't come."

"Goin', anyhow," said Marvel obstinately. "He's boun' fur to come," and he rose, and limped away.

It was a long tramp; but Marvel pushed on with dogged patience, till he drew near the little cluster of buildings — straw-sheds they were mostly — around John Faxon's cabin.

"Got things mighty comf'table. Wish 't we could have cows and horses like him," commented Marvel.

A woman, comely in smoothly braided hair and blue gingham dress, stood at the door as he walked into the yard.

"Where 's John Faxon?" said Marvel, without a thought of removing his cap.

"Oh, he 's about somewheres. What you want of him?" inquired the woman.

"Want him to come over," said Marvel.

"Why? You ain't none of you sick, be you?"

"Sick o' diggin' — that 's all, I reckon. We can't never dig up that gardin. Want him to come over and plow it."

"H'mph! reckon you brought along the money to pay him for leavin' his work in the hurryin' season, and goin' off three miles to plow a gardin," said the woman sharply.

"I 'll pay him. He hain't got nary boy to drop corn for him. I 'll drop corn to pay," said Marvel.

"Here he comes! He 'll speak for himself, I reckon."

"Hullo, Marv! What is it?" said John Faxon, as he came up to the door.

Marvel stated his errand, with the promise to drop corn in payment.

"Can't do it, nohow," said John with decided emphasis. "I 'm pushed this way and t' other; my work's gettin' all ahead of me, and I can't do fast enough. Such soft weather everything wants doin' all to once."

"Dean 's sot on a gardin. We can't dig it up. Most killed ourselves tryin'. I told 'em I 'd get ye to plow. I 've come all these three miles after ye, and yer boun' fur to come."

John looked at Marvel meditatively, and then remarked, "Lame some, ain't you?"

"Yes; always got to be, I reckon," said Marvel. "Ain't good for much, but I can drop corn. I 'll come and drop fur ye, stiddy, jest as long as yer say. Only ye 're boun' to come and plow that gardin."

"I reckon I 'm bound to stay home and do my own work," returned John. "But come in and have a bite of dinner. It 's noon by the sun, and I 'm ready for it, and I hope it 's ready for me."

Marvel's face brightened at this invitation. It brightened still more when he viewed the heaping bowl of potatoes, and the ample supply of boiled corned beef. He needed no second invitation to "fall to;" and so diligent was he in his application to this rare treat, that he spoke not one word till the last potato had vanished from sight.

"Wisht we had pertaters to plant in our gardin. Let us have a few for seed, I reckon, can't ye?" he remarked as he pushed back his chair. "Will ye come now, and plow?"

John Faxon laughed. "How you do stick to a feller!" he said. "I told you I could n't go nohow."

"But ye 're boun' to come! I'll drop corn for yer, and for the pertaters too."

"Why am I bound to come? I never agreed to do your plowin' for you," said John.

"We can't get nobody else, and Dean 's boun' fur to have a gardin," said Marvel.

John laughed again. He was amused, even while he was annoyed, at the persistence of the boy. He looked doubtfully at his wife, to see if he could find out what she thought he had better do.

"You 've got to go to Williams's after that harrow to-morrow; 't would n't be much out of your way, and the plowing would n't take no great while, I don't reckon," said she, replying to the look.

"And you ain't so very partic'ler about the job of droppin' the corn but what you could give it up, hey? Well, I don't know as I blame you. 'T aint a woman's work nohow. But what if this chap ain't ready to drop when I 'm ready to cover? That 's apt to be the way when folks get their pay aforehand."

"I will be," said Marvel earnestly. "Ye need n't be 'feared, for I 'll come whensoever ye say, night or day."

"I reckon 't won't be night. Come on then, and we 'll rig up the team, and I 'll go right along now, jest as well as to-morrow, and save you walkin' home. They say the lame and the lazy is pervided for. You 're one, for certain; and I 'm bound to find out whether or no you 're t' other. Emily," calling back to his wife, "you can be puttin' up a few potatoes, if you think we can spare 'em. They ought to have a few to plant, sure!"

A little after noon Dean and Dio were a good deal surprised to see Marvel riding home beside John Faxon; and when, in the course of the afternoon, they saw the soil of their garden over which they had labored so hard in vain, turned up mellow and brown, ready for planting, their joy was great. And when the bag of potatoes was taken out, and they comprehended that they were for them to plant, they had no words to express their pleasure. And John Faxon, rough and uncultured as he was, had too much of the milk of human kindness in his veins not to take some pleasure in their evident gratification. He volunteered some directions as to cutting and planting the potatoes, and laying out the garden, and then drove away, leaving Marvel vociferating his promises to "come and work faithful whensoever you say, night or day."

The accidental jingle of the words had pleased Marvel's ear so much that he had reiterated them till the promise could not fail to stick fast in his own memory, and in due time it was faithfully redeemed.

## CHAPTER X.

## AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

DAY after day Dean worked diligently at laying out and planting the garden, assisted sometimes by Marvel or Dio, or both. They had coaxed their father into buying a hoe; and the gift of a bicycle would be less of an event to many boys, than was the acquisition of that bright new hoe to the young gardeners.

They were all out at work one fine day, when a man on horseback was seen approaching.

"It looks like Mr. Capen," said Dio, "but it can't be."

"It is Mr. Capen!" said Dean joyfully, throwing down his hoe, and running to meet the advancing horseman.

It was, indeed, their friend. He seemed greatly pleased to see them again, and heard with sincere sympathy their story of loss and sorrow. He took little Martha in his arms and

kissed her, and praised the care that had kept her so plump and clean and well.

Marvel, who had avoided him on his first visit, was now as eager as any to be near him, and hear every word he spoke.

"Will you stay all night?" asked Dio.  
"We 'll do our best for you if you will."

"I thank you," said Mr. Capen, "but I am obliged to get on as fast as possible, as I have an engagement to meet, but passing so near, I could not miss of seeing you all."

He asked many questions concerning the death of their mother, and how they had got on since; frank, kindly questions, such as a dear and deeply interested friend would ask. Everything was told him without reserve, even Marvel answering freely, and making known all his stubbornness in refusing his mother's last request, and his repentance when it was too late. Mr. Capen was very wise in drawing him out, and when he saw that the poor lad, wrought up to a pitch of excitement by his own painful story, would soon give way to violent weeping, turned to the others, and gave him time to regain his self-control.



"Eh! but it's awful hard to be good! Can't remember it half the time!" remarked Marvel.

"Ask God to help you, dear boy! And remember that he still loves you and counts you his dear child, though you fall ever so many times, if you only keep right on trying, and don't give it up. What do you ask for when you pray to him?"

"I heard the rest say, 'Now I lay me' so often that I learned it," said Marvel. "I say that, and 'I promise to love God.' That's all I say."

"That's very well," said Mr. Capen, "but you might add this, 'Give me the Holy Spirit to teach me and help me to be good, and forgive my sins for Jesus's sake.'"

"Yes; I will," said Marvel.

"And you," said Mr. Capen to Dean, "do you read your little book a good deal?"

"Yes; and ma's Bible too," said Dean. "I can read better than I could when you came before."

"Do you keep up the reading after supper, since your mother died?"

"Oh, yes."

"And your father, — does he pray yet?"

"Not yet. He says he will sometime."

"How is it with you Dio: have you promised to love God too?"

"I don't know," said Dio. "I reckon I did n't promise for sure, but I say my prayers."

"You can't do better than to promise for sure, and that without any waiting. And Rolfe, too, and Vinnie, every one of you can love God, and be his dear children."

"And me too?" piped little Lottie, at his knees.

"Yes; Lottie also must be God's little child, and say her prayers, and try to please him."

"Lottie will," said the little one, beaming with satisfaction at being included with the rest.

"Now I must go," said Mr. Capen. "Here are some little books for you, — one apiece all round."

They were small books in paper covers, but the children looked upon them as very precious gifts.

He mounted his horse to go. They watched him regretfully, wishing he could stay longer.

He drew the reins, and looked at the little group with unfeigned solicitude. His heart yearned over these poor lambs without shepherd or fold.

"Do you know the Twenty-third Psalm, Dean? It begins, 'The Lord is my Shepherd.'"

"I don't think I ever read it," said Dean. "I can find it, though."

"I wish you would, and learn it. Every one of you learn it. It is a short one."

"We will. We will all learn it," they answered; and little Lottie was ready as any with her "Me will."

"I will write you a letter. Can either of you write me an answer?"

"I used to know how to make all the letters, but I reckon I 've forgot," said Dean regretfully.

"Then you could n't read my letter. But your father will read it to you. And you can get him to show you how to make all the letters, and then write me an answer."

"I reckon I might do that," said Dean.

"Well, good-by," and Mr. Capen gave the signal for his horse to start, and with many good-bys from the children he rode away, while they, having watched him out of sight, went into the house for dinner, after which they began writing all the letters they could remember. Paper was scarce, and pencils scarcer; but there were bits of

red chalk to be found occasionally among the stones of the old chimney, and with these they adorned the walls with rude characters, of all shapes and sizes, some of which it would be hard to recognize as letters. Even the baby caught the infection; and she would possess herself of a bit of chalk, and make a mark on the floor beside her, and then say "Ah!" which meant "See there!" She was a bright little thing, and they all loved her dearly. Instead of creeping as most babies do, she had learned to hitch herself about on the floor backwards. Her mode of travel was very amusing. Dean found his cares increased after she learned this, as she "got into everything," as he expressed it.

"Tether her, as we used to the calves," suggested her father.

So it was done. An old scarf was fastened about the baby's waist, and a short rope tied to that at one end and made fast to the bed-post at the other, often served to keep little Martha within safe limits.

## CHAPTER XI.

## NEW-COMERS.

THE children began to talk about having a cow, now that there was plenty of grass, everywhere, for her to eat. They grew quite ambitious, and their father was not backward in encouraging them with large promises as to what he would do "one of these days." But the wants of the family were many, and the opportunities of getting work were few; and now that the prudent counsels of his wife no longer influenced him, Felix would have meat and butter and sugar, though the want of clothing or other necessities were ever so pressing.

So far from having any money to lay by for the purchase of a cow, things presently came to such a pass that the little ones were almost destitute of clothing, and all, except the father, entirely destitute of shoes.

Dean felt that he was in a hard place. He had all his mother's love of neatness and decency, and

he struggled to make the poor rags of clothing hold together. Dio helped him sometimes, with many threats, as she worked, that she would go away to the city, and get a place to work and earn money for all their needs. Dean felt that she was much too young, and too giddy and thoughtless, to do this yet. He could not go. He must stay and supply his mother's place. The care of keeping the family together, the very existence of the smallest children, seemed to rest upon him; for neither Marvel nor Dio took much care upon themselves, except on some extraordinary occasions.

After many reminders, and many disappointments, Felix did, one day, bring home a dozen yards of calico.

"There!" said he, "I reckon that 'll make clo'es for the girls. I got it at a bargain. There 's heaps of it. Purty, too!"

Dean was so glad to get anything in the shape of cloth, that he found no fault, though he thought it anything but pretty, and the quality was very poor. Nor did he hint about any perplexity as to cutting and making. His fingers had long been trained to the use of the needle,

and he could mend strongly, if not handsomely. But to cut out and make a new article of clothing was another thing.

Dio, roused to some enthusiasm by the new material, though she, too, thought the color and pattern very ugly, really developed some womanly capacity in the matter of cutting out and fitting a dress for the baby, and then another for Lottie. Dean toiled away at these under her direction, till he had the pleasure of seeing the little ones clad once more in something that would at least cover their little bodies.

Dio was at work, meanwhile, upon a dress for herself. It did not suit her taste at all to sit and sew, in the fine, bright days of early summer; but her threats of going from home had not been wholly idle. She really wished to get away. She chafed under the poverty and wretchedness of their life; and, young as she was, she felt quite capable of making her way in the world. But how could she go away until she had at least a decent dress and a pair of shoes? This new dress was a step toward the accomplishment of her plan. So she fitted and sewed with a will.

Marvel's self-respect and self-reliance had con-

siderably increased since he had accomplished the feat of getting the garden plowed. He had worked at it since with some zeal and perseverance. Occasionally he repeated the walk of three miles to John Faxon's house; and sometimes John would give him a little work, paying him in such things as he could spare, — a little pork or sorghum molasses, or a few potatoes. John bore with his noisy, bragging tongue, and his blundering, troublesome ways to a degree that was remarkable. Perhaps he felt some remorse at the remembrance of the rude awakening he had given the poor lad at his mother's death. But, though Marvel was not an agreeable companion, he made himself useful, doing with dogged persistency any work that he could do. His strength had increased, as he used it, till there was no lack of bodily vigor. His father had so far redeemed his promise, that in the month of June he had about four acres of ground broken up, and planted to sod-corn, pumpkins, and melons, which might, if it should prove a favorable season, help a good deal toward their support.

It was a gala day when the corn-planting began. Every child was out to help, or to look on.



Marvel and Dio did most of the planting. Armed with an old ax, and a pocket full of seed, they followed the furrows, chopping a fissure every three or four feet, into which they dropped corn, and then closed it over the seed with a light pressure of the foot.

Dean walked up and down the furrows with little Martha, whose big sunbonnet now drooped over her face so she could not see at all, and now, pushed back by her vigorous little hands, lay on her shoulders, leaving her shining brown head bare to the sun and air.

While they were all thus interested and busy, the rare spectacle of an emigrant wagon drawn by mules came in sight. They watched it, till they saw it come to a stop on a piece of rising ground about a quarter of a mile east of their cabin.

“Lookee! going to have some neighbors, I reckon,” said Marvel. “I heerd tell as some one had took up that piece over yonder.”

Three men were presently seen walking about, unharnessing their mules, staking them out to feed upon the prairie grass, and presently making certain measurements with poles set in the ground.

Not a motion was lost upon the interested spectators. Any change in the monotony of their lives was eagerly welcomed, and there would be many advantages in having a neighbor so near.

Presently they were rejoiced to see one of the men, pail in hand, coming toward their home.

"He 's after a bucket of water," said Dean. "Now we shall know;" and he made his way homeward as fast as he could with his little sister in his arms, the rest of the children following. Even their father and John Faxon, leaving the plow in the furrow, came up to the cabin to greet the new-comer, and satisfy their curiosity. He was a small gray-haired man, with a slight lameness on one side, but he had a clean, wholesome, intelligent face.

"Howdy, stranger! Glad to know you 're coming to settle a-near us," said Felix. "Shake!"

The stranger gave his hand to Felix, and then to John Faxon, in a manner sufficiently cordial; but he seemed a silent, shy man compared with Felix, who was nothing loath to do most of the talking.

"I see you 've took up that claim over yonder.

Good piece o' land as lies out-doors. I wonder nobody has n't hitched onto it afore now."

"Yes. I 've entered on that quarter section, and bought the one joining it on the south," replied the stranger. "I 've got two boys. The two lots will give us all the land we 'll ever want to work."

"Yes; if ye don't git land greedy. Folks is apt to after they 've been here a spell; specially if they see the land bein' taken up pretty fast. An' then they git land poor. Lots o' folks gits land poor. They 'd orter spend their money on improvements 'stead o' gittin' more land. You've got a fine spot to build on, over there."

"Yes. I thought so. A rise of ground makes it pleasanter."

"My name is Felix Windom. What mought yourn be?"

"Samuel Lewis is my name."

"Howdy, Mr. Lewis! Glad to 'have ye for a neighbor. This here is John Faxon. Used to be one o' my neighbors, back where I come from, an' now he 's a neighbor agin. I reckon you brought your hull family along."

"Yes," said Mr. Lewis; "all I have left. A daughter and two sons."

"Sho! A widder-man I reckon. That's just my case. A gre't loss was my woman," said Felix. "Died last winter of the neumony. I reckon likely your girl is some bigger 'n mine; she ain't much of a housekeeper, yet,—Diodema ain't. Dean, here, is the head o' the' housekeepin'. Dean 's a right down regulator. He 's got an old head, if he is little. Them two is twins, though you would n't think it. Dean 's had all the care o' that baby day and night sence her mother died. Ain't she healthy lookin'? Don't her eyes shine? Got her mother's eyes. They don't none on em favor me, exceptins o' Marvel, and," discontentedly, "he don't do me the credit he 'd order."

Dean, abashed at the praise his father had bestowed upon him, had tried to shrink behind Marvel and Dio, but he had to come forward to exhibit the baby. He was glad when she became her father's theme of conversation.

"Yes," replied Mr. Lewis, "my daughter is older. In fact, she 's my first wife's child. The two boys are by my second wife. Felicia is a good housekeeper. She has had experience. She was only ten when her mother died, and she kept house for me all the next year, and she 's always

been as good as a right hand to her stepmother. And now she's my dependance again. I don't need to ask for any better, as far as housekeeping goes. What she does n't know is n't worth knowing in that line, if I do say it myself."

"Goin' right to buildin'?" asked John Faxon.

"Yes; just as soon as we can. We want to get in something of a crop first. You're planting yet, I see."

This led to a discussion of the chances of getting a crop of sod-corn from so late planting,—interesting only to farmers.

Dio, on hearing that there was a girl over on the new claim, had cast some wistful glances that way, and now, in a low tone, announced to Dean her intention of going over to see her. Dean nodded approvingly, and off she ran, like a deer, across the strip of prairie.

She came up, panting and rosy, at the side of the emigrant wagon. On the farther side, sheltered from the view of their only neighbor by the wagon, stood a tall, angular woman bending over a cook-stove. She was at least thirty years old. Her plain, dark face was comely only in its intelligence and kindness.

"I thought — he said — there was a girl here," Dio began in some embarrassment.

"Yes. I 'm the girl, — Mr. Lewis's daughter. You expected to see a little girl, I suppose. Well, I 'm sorry, but I 'm all the girl he 's got."

"Is your name F'licia?" asked Dio.

"My name 's Felicia," with distinct enunciation of all the syllables.

"It 's a pretty name," remarked Dio, making keen use of her eyes to find out all she could concerning her new neighbor's belongings. "Got right smart of pork, have n't you?" peering into a barrel that had been taken out of the wagon to make way in getting out the stove.

"Your mother ought to teach you better manners than to go peeping into folk's pork-barrels," said Miss Felicia, turning sharply, and clapping the cover on the barrel.

"Law! I did n't mean no harm," said Dio, rather dismayed. "I hain't got no mother; she 's dead."

"Oh, is she? Then I 'm sorry I spoke out so. I 'm a little hasty in the temper, and that 's a fact. Are there other neighbors anywhere near?"

Dio nodded. "The Williamses, about a mile

over yonder," pointing westward, "and the Fax-  
ons, three miles that a-way," pointing south.

"That all? And no school I suppose, and no  
meetings on Sunday."

"No," said Dio.

"The Williamses, — are they religious folks?"

Dio meditated, and then nodded. "I reckon  
*she* is," was the reply.

"Are there no others? No religious folks any-  
where near?"

"There 's Mr. Holt. He 's an old man that  
lives a ways down the creek. I don't know how  
far. He made a prayer, and spoke at ma's  
funeral. I never saw him before or since."

"H'm! No meeting, — four families within  
perhaps as many miles," mused Miss Felicia.  
"Well, we 're going to have a meeting. That 's  
a settled fact. I told father, when we were plan-  
ning to come out here, that we must have a meet-  
ing every Sunday, if nobody came to it but our  
own four selves. Four families will make quite  
a congregation; and if we can't have a minister,  
there 's a sermon in our paper every week, and  
somebody can read that. I suppose there is n't  
even a school-house to have it in. Well, we shall

see. Only there 'll be a meeting; you mark that. Maybe it 'll be in our wagon, or on the open prairie; but there 'll be one."

"May I come?" asked Dio.

"To be sure you may. That 's just what is wanted, — to have everybody come."

"I reckon you come from a good ways off," said Dio.

"Only from the jumping-off place on the coast of Maine," said Miss Felicia with a laugh. "Two thousand miles, or such a matter."

"My! That 's a ways!" said Dio. "I should think the mules would be nigh about dead, and you, too, going so far."

"Oh, we came in the cars most of the way," said Miss Felicia. "We bought the mules and the wagon in Kansas City."

"Spect you 'll like it here?" asked Dio.

"We 've come to stay," said Miss Felicia; "and I 'm determined to like it, if I can. I hated to leave my old neighbors, and the farmhouse where I was born, and the rocks and hills. I loved them, every one. But it was best for the boys. The farm was small and sandy, and though the rocks and hills were pretty to look at, they did n't



make us a living. Father and I wanted the boys to have a better chance, and I guess they 'll get it out here;" and she looked about upon the broad expanse of prairie with some gratification.

"It 'll seem more like home when you get a cabin built, and a garden," suggested Dio.

"Of course it will. I 've brought roses and lilacs clear from my old garden in Maine. I took a sight of pains to keep them fresh all the way. I hope they 'll live; though it does n't look much like setting them out, on this thick sod. I don't know how I 'll manage, but there 'll be a way. Albert dug up a sod, and we 've got them in the ground."

"You 'd ought to come earlier, so you could have a garden," said Dio. "We 've got ours all planted, and some of the things have come up already."

"We meant to, and I thought we should, but we 've had a good many hindrances. I feel the worst about the garden. I don't know how to get along without one. I feel as if I want to take a spade and go right at this tough old sod myself."

"You can't do it," said Dio. "We tried, and it was too hard."

"Oh, I don't expect to. The boys will plow a piece this afternoon. Then I shall shake out the sods, and make the best I can of it. I only spoke so because I feel so impatient to get some seed in."

Mr. Lewis now returned with the water, and as Dio saw that they were about to eat dinner, she took her leave.

## CHAPTER XII.

## GETTING READY FOR MEETING.

Dio's call was returned the very next morning. Miss Felicia proved herself in earnest in her purpose of maintaining public worship; for, notwithstanding her great desire to be at work upon a garden, she had come to ask Dio's company on a long walk.

"I found out from your father where that Mr. Holt lives that you told me about," she said. "I want to go and see him. It is four miles, but I can walk as far as that in a good cause. Can you go with me?"

Dio was pleased to go with her new neighbor. She put on the homely new dress, and a tiny white apron, her sole remnant of better days.

"I don't know but you'll be ashamed of my bare feet," said she, suddenly bethinking herself. "I forgot I had n't any shoes. Maybe I'd better not go, after all."

"I'm not ashamed to go with you," said Miss

Felicia. "I 'm sorry you have no shoes, but if you can stand it, I can."

Dio laughed, much relieved, and getting her sunbonnet, declared herself ready. It was a long walk, and the sun was hot. Miss Felicia's face grew crimson beneath the straw hat she wore, but she patiently plodded on till they came in sight of a small frame house. As they drew near, an old man, with thin white locks around a mild and kindly face, laid down his hoe and came out of his garden to meet them. "How do you do? I take it you are our new neighbor," said he cordially. "Walk right in out of the hot sun. My wife will be glad to give you a drink of butter-milk, and a seat in the shade."

The wife was not slow in making her appearance, and her welcome was as hearty as her husband's.

"We 're very glad of the sight of neighbors," said she. "Sit right down here in the porch where it 's cool and shady, and take off your things. I 'll get you a fan and a drink."

The porch was only a rude frame covered with rough boards, but it added materially to the comfort of the house by shading the west door from

the afternoon sunshine. As it was yet early in the day it was a cool and comfortable place to sit, and chairs were speedily brought out for the comfort of the visitors. The cool, fresh buttermilk, and a few minutes' rest, restored our weary travelers, and their errand was soon made known.

"Just what we've been wishing, is n't it, wife?" said Mr. Holt; while Mrs. Holt, with tears of joy in her eyes, seized her visitor by both hands, having no words to express her joy at finding in the new neighbor a friend of her great Friend, and an efficient helper in a cause she loved.

Miss Felicia explained that her father and brothers were as desirous as she to have a "meeting" on the Sabbath, only she could spare the time to come and see about it better than they. They would be on hand to help, if a place to meet could be found.

"We've nothing to offer but the wagon we came in," she said.

"We've one comfortable room, and that's as much as anybody in these parts has yet. The meeting can be here, if folks will come so far, and I guess they will," said Mrs. Holt.

"How shall we let them know?" asked Miss Felicia.

"By word of mouth," said Mr. Holt; "there 's no other way. Give the word to anybody you can see, and ask them to pass it along. I 've neighbors two miles east, and there 's Stevens that owns the saw-mill, and lives a mile south of us. I 'll engage to let them know."

"I 'll go over to the Williamses and tell them," said Dio.

"I don't know where to find anybody," said Miss Felicia. "If you 'll tell me where to go, I 'll do my part."

"I guess you 've done your part already. You 've set the ball a-rolling," said Mr. Holt. "But there 's the Faxons."

"I reckon Marv will be going over there to-morrow," said Dio; "he 'll tell them."

"I don't think of anybody else we can send word to. But if these all come, that will make quite a houseful, and others may hear of it through them, if there are others."

Mr. Holt was of the opinion that they had better attempt only a Sabbath-school to begin with. "When we get better acquainted with our

neighbors, and their gifts, we can go on to a prayer-meeting, and perhaps a minister will come along and give us a sermon now and then."

Miss Felicia would have liked to have a sermon read, but she bethought herself that as they were to occupy Mr. Holt's house, he perhaps ought to decide the character of the service.

"We 'll have plenty of Bible-reading and singing, and if anybody has a word of explanation or exhortation to put in, we 'll not be stiff; they 'll get a chance," said he. "If we only had hymn-books. Folks like singing, and I think it's profitable, — 'psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.' "

"We brought along a couple of dozen small gospel hymn-books," said Miss Felicia. "Our church in Maine gave them to us for this very purpose."

"Why, that 's riches! Two dozen! We 'll set out in fine shape," said Mrs. Holt joyfully.

When all the preliminaries had been settled, Mrs. Holt took her visitors into her garden to show her few floral treasures. There was a crimson peony just shaking out its leaves in the sunshine, and sending up great round buds from

its heart; near it was a lilac, already clothed in green, and with red buds near to blossoming, and a small rose-bush as full of promise as if it were wholly unconscious that it had been lately transplanted a thousand miles from its native home. Every one of these things was of keen interest to these pioneers in a land where all was new and wild. A few plants reminded them of their old homes. Dio bent over the rose-bush with exclamations of delight.

"Oh, my! Would n't ma have liked to see this? Ma was so fond of flowers! I've got flower-seeds planted, and some of them have come up, but would n't I like a rose-bush!"

"You shall have a root sometime, if this one lives and grows," said Mrs. Holt. "Here 's a bit of English ivy," and she broke a small piece from a vine that was beginning to clamber up the porch. "If you keep it in water it will root and begin to grow. Then when the roots are well developed, set it in the ground, close to your cabin, and it will cover it all over, if it keeps on growing long enough. It 's always green, winter and summer."

Dio thanked Mrs. Holt, and cherished her ivy with care. Cheered and refreshed they then set



out for home. The sun was higher and hotter than when they came, but light hearts made the walk seem an easy one.

There was no small degree of excitement in the Windom cabin over the possibility of "going to meeting," as they called it.

"I'm going!" said Dio. "Pa, you must get me some shoes before Sunday; I can't go barefoot, and I'm bound to go."

"I'm a-goin'!" said Marvel. "My shoes 'll do. Dean 'll sew 'em up."

"I'm goin'!" said Rolfe. "I can go barefoot."

"I'm going!" said Vinnie, ignoring the question of shoes altogether.

Not one of the family was willing to stay at home. Even the father began to look himself over and suggest repairs on his clothing to Dio.

Yet some one would have to stay at home with the little ones, too small to walk so far. Dean's heart sank as he was speedily brought to the conclusion that he must be the one to stay. Dean, who cared most of all for the real purpose of the meeting, was the only one who had any notion of self-denial, and he must yield, and let the rest go.

There were serious obstacles in the way of any

one of them. The father had no resources. The care of making their poor clothing decent, so far as mending and patching could do it, fell upon Dean and Dio, — and that meant upon Dean chiefly.

A day's work turned up for Mr. Windom, and Dio rejoiced in the possession of a pair of new shoes. She strongly disliked the new calico dress, which a single washing had already faded to a muddy no-color. She went to the small blue chest where was kept the very small stock of clothing that had been her mother's. There was one light calico dress that she determined to make over for herself. Absorbed in the work of making herself ready, she left the burden of care for the rest of the family to Dean, who bravely and resolutely began his task.

On Thursday Albert Lewis came over to say that they could all ride in his father's big wagon. Dean's eyes shone, and his heart leaped up at this word, but it sunk again almost immediately, in view of the added burden of getting ready. He had all he could do to get those ready who were planning to go before this offer came. How could he possibly get himself and the little ones in

order also? The father set aside all care on this score, however, and replied that they would all be glad to go, and Albert went away.

"Freely help me get ready, please, our Father! I don't see how I can alone," was Dean's silent petition. The answer came. The next day Miss Felicia came over.

"I thought, as you 've no mother, and Dio is n't quite a woman yet, you might be glad of a little assistance," said she, putting her homely, wholesome face in at the cabin door, as it stood open wide to let in the sweet May air and sunshine. "So I took my thimble and came over to help you get all fixed for meeting. Just show me what needs doing," she added, familiarly taking a chair at Dean's side, "and I 'm all ready."

Dean felt frightened at the idea of putting into a stranger's hands the forlorn garments he was trying to mend, but without farther ceremony she took from him the poor little coat of Rolfe's that he was rudely patching with a different color, and set herself at work, seeming to see exactly what needed to be done, and what was attainable.

She had brought not only a thimble, but needles and thread, and a goodly roll of patches of a

variety of colors, and under her swift and energetic fingers one garment after another was made whole and decent. Dean's shyness vanished before her friendliness, and his heart grew light and thankful as his burden of care grew less. She worked till the sun began to near the western horizon. Then she began to take certain measurements of Lottie and the baby, saying, "You need n't do a thing for these two. I 've an old light dress that I 've no use for, and it will make dresses for both of them. I can run them together this evening and to-morrow, and some little bonnets too. I 'll have them all ready, and you come over early Sunday morning, say by nine o'clock, and we 'll dress them over there. Give them a bath the night before. You 'll find Sunday morning short enough for all you 'll have to accomplish, if you don't have that to do."

"I 'm more thankful than I know how to tell you," said Dean. "I thought Dio and I never could get all the children ready; and you 've made things look a heap better than we could."

"I 'm your neighbor, and I 've only acted neighborly," said Miss Felicia. "You may do as much for me some day."

"I wish I could," said Dean heartily.

"I believe you 're a good boy," said Miss Felicia as heartily. "Now good-by till Sunday morning. There 's plenty left to do, and we 'll all have to be busy as bees."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE FIRST SUNDAY-SCHOOL.

"I DECLARE! I did n't know I had such a purty family," said Felix as they issued from the cabin on Sunday morning, and, with no useless precaution of fastening the door behind them, took their way to the camp of their new neighbors.

Dean surveyed his little flock with a mixture of solicitude and satisfaction. Dio, he thought, looked very nice in her tidy dress and white apron, with her new shoes and some white stockings that she had found among her mother's things. She had made the best of her old gingham bonnet by washing, starching, and ironing it, so it no longer fell a limp rag, drooping over her face; and she had done the same for Vinnie's.

"But Vinnie has n't any shoes," said Dean in reply to his father's remark. "I think girls ought to have shoes."

"Nobody ain't goin' to mind if a little girl like

her does go to meetin' barefoot. But Lavinny shall have shoes by next Sunday," replied Felix.

Dean said no more, though he was secretly dissatisfied that his own and Rolfe's feet were bare; and Marvel's shoes, in spite of all his efforts at repairs, would not hold together to take the short walk that lay before them. But Marvel did not care. He was quite as comfortable without them, and cheerfully carried them in his hand till he was quite near the Lewis encampment. It could truly be called nothing but an encampment as yet. A rude tent had been put up, under which was the cook-stove and such articles as must be sheltered. The wagon had been Miss Felicia's private apartment, but for this day she had surrendered it, and her bed and other belongings were bestowed under the tent. There was no room for visitors inside it, so they all stood about the wagon while Lottie and the baby were dressed in the neat clothing Miss Felicia had prepared.

"You won't let them wear these things, only on Sundays, will you Dio?" said she. "It's the best way to have something to wear to meeting, and keep it for that."

"No, I won't," said Dio.

Miss Felicia was too discerning not to see who was the real manager and care-taker; but she held the theory that if it was n't Dio, it ought to be, and she thought it best to lay her charges upon her as if she supposed it to be so. Dean was quick enough to take a hint. He needed no charges.

The ride to meeting was a rare treat, and greatly enjoyed by the children. Dean had forgotten all about clothes and all their other cares for the time, long before they got to Mr. Holt's house, and were seated in a row on rough boards laid on boxes, chairs, or whatever would serve. They were early, but already several people had come, and soon the services commenced.

The singing was delightful to the young Windoms, who, since they left their old home in Southern Illinois, where the older ones had occasionally been to Sabbath-school, had heard no music but that which they had made themselves, which was apt to be too boisterous to be very melodious. They were all fond of singing, and had vainly tried to piece together some fragments of gospel hymns that they remembered, into one complete whole, but they really knew nothing



that could be called a hymn. A few foolish songs that they had learned from their father amused them sometimes, but the pleasure excited by these sweet hymns was a very different feeling. All the Lewis family had good voices, and the melody that filled the room so pleased and astonished the children that they never once thought of attempting to join even in the chorus, till Miss Felicia, who sat behind Dean, touched him on the shoulder, and whispered, "Sing! You can help on the chorus, I'm sure."

Thus prompted, Dean joined, timidly at first, but soon, finding that nobody noticed him, with more confidence; and the others, seeing that he was singing, began to try a little. They were quite sorry when the hymn was ended. But after reading from the Bible there was more singing.

Dean felt tears of thankfulness and joy rising and filling his eyes. This was exactly what he liked, and had wanted. He looked at Dio for sympathy; but Dio's eyes were roving over the congregation, and her thoughts had wandered to the dresses and bonnets around her. Dean was never quite happy and satisfied unless he could

share all his joys and sorrows with Twinnie, as he had called her in their baby days. Of late he had been growing away from Twinnie. He did not like it. "I wish she would care for such things as I do," he thought uneasily.

But the time had now come for the school to be arranged into classes, and the train of Dean's thought was broken by new interests. He and his brothers, with two other boys, were put into a class of which Albert Lewis was the teacher. Dio, with several girls, was under Miss Felicia. Vinnie, with all the other little ones, was under the care of good Mrs. Holt. There were two Bible classes, — one of the more mature young people, and one of the old or elderly. Mr. Holt, who had been chosen superintendent, had the care of the former, and Mr. Lewis, who was his assistant, of the latter class.

"We 'll just begin at the beginning of the Bible," said the superintendent. "It's my idea that's the proper place to begin to study God's Word."

So they began with the first chapter of Genesis. There was enough in that lesson to give Dean food for thought through all the week. He had

read the chapter before, but his young teacher explained it so clearly, and threw so much new light upon it, that he went home stirred with that eager, keen, joyful interest that only the true lover of knowledge can feel.

The coming of the Lewis family, and the opening of a Sabbath-school, marked a new era in the life of Dean and Dio, and more or less affected every one in the family in the log cabin. It happened one evening a few weeks later that Marvel was sent on an errand to the new neighbors.

"Come in, Marvel," said Miss Felicia pleasantly. "We 've got a house to ask folks into, at last, — small and rough enough to be sure, but we appreciate it, after doing without for a month."

Marvel walked in, surveying the new house with interest.

"Got two rooms! You 're fine!" said he. "Pretty good house, I think. A heap better 'n ourn."

The table stood in the middle of the kitchen. A clean white cloth covered it, and the tea things were arranged upon it. Marvel looked with

admiration at the pretty blue-and-white dishes, the bright tea-spoons, and well-polished knives and forks.

“Got mighty pretty things!” he remarked.

Mr. Lewis laughed, and invited him to eat with them. Marvel was always ready to accept an invitation to eat, so a place was made for him at the table. After supper Mr. Lewis took a Bible from a shelf, and read a few verses. Then they sang a hymn, and then knelt in prayer. Marvel was quiet and attentive till it was over, and then he did his errand and hastened home, to tell there all he had seen and heard. They were just sitting down to eat supper when he reached home, and listened with eager interest to all he had to tell.

“Should think we might sing and pray too. Wish pa was like Mr. Lewis,” said he.

“Pa,” who had listened without comment or apparent interest, being thus challenged, aroused himself to self-defense. “Who hendes your singin’?” said he. “Sing all you want to. As to the prayin’, I reckon all men ain’t alike. Mr. Lewis has a gift for prayin’. I don’t say I hain’t no gift that way, but I ’m out o’ practice, and

when a man's out o' practice he don't want to set up for a parson."

"You won't never get into practice, if you don't begin sometime," said Dio.

"You hush, Diodema. What does a girl like you know about what's proper? The fact is," said he, leaning back in his chair, and thrusting a thumb in each vest pocket, as he was accustomed to do when meditating a speech, "I never felt like I wanted to be what you'd call downright religious. I've always been a poor man, and I want to git on, — git a start, ye know; and I'm afraid religion would be a hendrance; in fact, I know it's a hendrance. A man that goes in deep for religion is bound to let chances go by: — we'll say chances to work, 'count o' their happenin' to come of a Sunday. How can a man what's got seven child'en let any chances go by? I got Vinnie's new shoes by workin' of a Sunday. I hain't done it afore sence yer ma went away, and I did think I should n't do it, let what would come. But 't was a case of necessity. Dean said it, — did n't you Dean? — 't wan't decent to let a girl go barefoot to Sunday-school. Did n't I do right to get that girl a pair o' shoes? I'd like to put it to anybody."

"I said she ought to have shoes," objected Dean, "but I did n't mean you to get 'em by working Sunday."

"Lewis's folks don't seem to be hindered by religion. They 're a heap better off than we are," said Dio.

"Ye always put yer oar in agin me, Diodema. Ye better hush. Maybe I 'm goin' to get ye a straw hat with ribbins some o' these days. I guess ye 'd wear it, if I did work Sunday to get it."

Dio hushed. The desire of her heart was a straw hat with ribbons. But Dean, seeing that his sister had no word to say in reply, could not be quiet.

"O pa! O Dio! Let 's all go withoutt anything or everything rather than work Sunday. Ma was against it, and God is against it."

"Better 'member 'bout my toes," said Marvel sententiously.

"Yer toes!" said his father with scornful emphasis. "That was all yer own fool doin's. Ye just shut up, and not throw up at yer own father what ye was to blame for yer own self. Ye can read and sing and pray too, all yer a

mind to. I ain't agoin' into no such tom-foolery," and he pushed back his chair, and hurried out of the cabin.

Dean looked after him sorrowfully. "Oh dear, now he won't stay to read with us any more," said he. "I wish we had n't provoked him. It was n't of any use."

"Oh, he 'll get over it. He 'll forget all about it by to-morrow. Let 's sing, anyhow," said Dio.

Dio loved dearly to sing. Miss Felicia had loaned her one of the hymn-books the Sabbath before, and now she brought it, and after the reading they sang several hymns. The twilight deepened into night, and little Martha's head drooped on Dean's breast in sleep, and still they sang, till their father, whose easy good-nature made it impossible to hold anger long, came back and sat on the doorstep, and joined in the chorus : —

" We shall all meet there,  
We shall all meet there.  
If we love the Lord, and obey his Word,  
We shall all meet there."

But he never thought what an important IF that was.

## CHAPTER XIV.

*A REFUSAL.*

FROM the time Miss Felicia first saw Dean's serious face, already old with constant care and solicitude, she had been uncommonly drawn to him; and as she came to know him and appreciate his faithful, unselfish efforts to fill his dead mother's place, her sympathy and motherly tenderness grew, so that all Mr. Windom's self-conceit, pomposity, and disagreeable familiarity of manner, and all the untidiness and discomfort of the poor home, could not so repel her as to prevent her frequent visits, with help and counsel for the boy; and her strong influence constrained Dio to do her part much more faithfully than heretofore.

"You 'll have to take the consequences, if you will persist in going to the Windoms', and doing so much for those children," said Albert Lewis, laughingly, to his sister one day. "Windom has n't been working and saving to get himself a new hat and coat for nothing. I can see his one



eye turning to your corner every Sunday, like a needle to the pole. You may as well have your answer ready; for you 'll surely get an offer of the position of mistress of the log cabin, and step-mother to all those children, before long."

"I can't help it," said Miss Felicia. "It seems to me I never knew such a boy as Dean Windom. He 's trying to carry a load too heavy for one pair of grown-up shoulders, and he 's so brave and patient that I *must* help him all I can. And he 's fairly hungry after knowledge. He never forgets a thing I tell him, and the next time I come he has ready a dozen questions that show how he 's been turning the subject over and over in his mind ever since. It 's a pity he can't go to school. But I 'm determined to do all I can for him. Dio is a bright girl too, but she is n't like Dean. She needs a mother, if ever a girl did."

"You don't mean, Felicia Lewis, that you 'd sacrifice yourself to that man for the sake of his children!"

"No, I don't. But I 'll mother them all I can, in spite of him. He will persist in calling me Flisby, and acting as if he did n't and could n't and would n't understand that I can hardly endure

the sight of him. I 'm as grim and offish as an old maid can possibly be," said Miss Felicia, laughing, though tears of vexation filled her eyes. "I 'm at my wits' end sometimes. But — marry him? Not if he was the last man! I don't know what I 'm crying for, I 'm sure," and she laughed again, wiping away fresh tears at the same instant; "but that man has exasperated me till I don't know what to do."

"Let him come to the point, and then speak plainly," suggested Albert.

"I shall have to. There 's no choice left me," said Miss Felicia ruefully. "I only hope I can make him understand, and not be too savage. When a man offers a woman the best he has to offer, she ought to be grateful, I suppose, and at least give him a kind, civil answer. But he 's so conceited that I 'm afraid that won't settle him. If he 'd done his part as well, according to his ability, as poor Dean has, it 's my opinion his wife would be alive now, and it does seem as if I must tell him so."

"No use. 'What 's wanting can't be numbered,' as grandfather used to say," said Albert.

"That 's Scripture," said Miss Felicia.

The same evening on which this conversation occurred, Felix Windom put on his new coat and hat after supper, and then taking a paper collar from his pocket proceeded to arrange it on his neck, while his children looked on, wondering where he might be going. The need of a collar had never before been apparent to Felix. Indeed, he had often scoffed at those who seemed to think that bit of adornment necessary, so the children were quite amazed to see him putting one on. But he was baffled in his attempt.

"Can't you fix this thing on for me, Diodema?" said he after a few minutes' trying. "It will stick right up behind, all I can do, and there don't seem to be nothin' to fasten it to. It's got three button-holes and nary button."

Dio came to his assistance, and he sat down that she might reach him more easily.

"I don't know how they fasten them," said she. "I reckon those two button-holes are to button onto the front of your shirt, but there's no button on it at the neck."

"Then sew one on; I can wait," said her father.

So Dio began to hunt for a button, needle, and

thread. These were not to be found in a moment, Dio had too many places for her things. Her father waited, appearing to fall into a brown study the while. Suddenly he smote the table with his fist, making every child start.

“Child’en!” he said, “my mind ’s made up, and I ’ll tell ye my reasons. Sence yer ma died I ’ve been lonesome like, and things has kind o ’gone to wrack. The clo’es don’t get mended to hold together as they ’d oughter, and nothin’ ain’t done as yer ma used to do it. I ain’t a complainin’ of ye. Yer ’ve done fine, — done noble, seein’ as yer nothin’ but child’en. But I need a companion. And if Miss Flishy knows how to ’preciate a stiddy man that don’t drink nor swear, and has got a good bit of book learnin’, I ’ll ask her to come over to stay. How ’d ye like that?” and he gave the table a second thump, harder than the first.

He looked around upon the little group, waiting for an answer.

“If yer ’ve got anything to say agin it, speak, or forevermore hold yer peace,” said he. “I ’ve give ye my reasons. Are they good, or ain’t they? Speak, or forevermore hold yer peace.” This

sentence had so pleased Felix's ear, it sounded so oratorical, that he must needs repeat it; and he turned his one eye from face to face, awaiting an answer.

Dio giggled in a foolish way, and looked round at Dean; but, seeing that he seemed very sober, she recovered herself, and answered, —

"I 'm sure I hain't any objections. I 'd like somebody to come and smart up things. Miss Felicia is real pleasant, only she can be some fearsome when she 's a mind to."

"She won't come," said Marvel bluntly. "I know she won't come!"

"Marv!" said his father, frowning sternly upon him, "Miss Flishy is a woman of sense, I take it. She knows the vally of a stiddy man."

"If she only would come," said Dean, clasping his hands tightly together in his enthusiasm. "Oh, if she only would!"

"Well, I 'm a-goin' to ask her. I reckon she 's a woman of sense, and my mind 's made up, and I 've give ye my reasons, and now, if yer 've nothin' agin it," — Felix had intended to bring in his grandiloquent sentence the third time, but he had somehow stumbled, and missed of coming out

as he expected, so after an instant of hesitation he closed with, — “ye may jest hold yer peace.”

Then Dio sewed the button on, and, with a pin to keep it down behind, it seemed to be all right. He brushed his much-neglected hair smooth and straight, and then he went forth into the dusky evening.

“They ’ll all be there. How can he ask her before them all?” said Dio with a womanly instinct of the fitness of things.

“She won’t come,” persisted Marvel.

“I ’m afraid she won’t come,” echoed Dean. “She ’s too different from us. What kind of a place would this be for a lady like her to live in?”

“Why don’t we tidy up?” said Rolfe. “Maybe she ’ll come. Look at this hump-a-dy room! Let ’s make it as nice as we can,” and he began hastily to put together the supper dishes that were still unwashed on the table.

“Law, she ain’t coming to-night, you don’t suppose, do you?” said Dio. “They ’d have to go off somewhere to a minister and get married.”

“Oh, would they? I didn’t think of that,” said Rolfe.

They spent the time of their father's absence in discussing the probabilities of his success, and building some air-castles of what might be. It was not so very long. Before they had begun to look for him, his hand was heard on the door-latch, and he came in.

"What ye settin' up here for, — burnin' out oil all this time?" said he crossly. "Go to bed, every young-un of ye. Hain't cleared off that table yet. Purty housekeepers you air. Ye need n't stop to do it now. Go to bed, I say. Dio, have things ready, quick meter."

Dio got the beds ready as fast as she could, asking no questions; and in a very few minutes the light was extinguished, and they all lay down to rest, the last gleam of hope of such a blessed change in their circumstances, as had for a brief time seemed possible, expiring in even the most sanguine heart.

## CHAPTER XV.

## SCHOOLING.

TIME passed, bringing a few changes upon Billow Prairie. Some new families had come to make a home in the neighborhood. At least three small houses were now in sight from the Windom cabin, which was not much changed. Felix did a little patching to roof or sides when the need became imperative, — not before. Dean was growing larger and stronger, and his work and care showed in the house, which was growing more tidy, with added conveniences in the way of cupboards and shelves; and in the front yard, where he and Marvel had set out several small trees for shade, which, small as they were, relieved the nakedness of the place, and gave promise of better things by and by.

Dio's bit of ivy had grown, and clambered about the door; and she had rooted other slips which she took from the first, and set them around the house, eager to cover its homeliness with the



glossy green leaves as soon as possible. She was developing more and more ability for housekeeping, and making and mending the clothes for the family. Vinnie was beginning to be some help. Rolfe had parted with his chills, and, though still rather a silent boy, was more active and vigorous. Little Martha, or Mattie as they called her, was as rosy and happy as ever, cheering everybody in the house with her sweet, confiding ways.

Miss Felicia would not give up her efforts to benefit the children in the log cabin, notwithstanding the unpleasant little episode she had encountered, and the fact that, in spite of her strong determination and effort to make her answer to Felix so decisive that it would settle matters once for all, his hopes and plans seemed to revive about once in every six months, and had to be unmercifully extinguished again. Perhaps the circumstances will excuse her if she studied to make her visits as often as possible in the father's absence.

Her constant influence was felt in the cabin to everybody's advantage. The Lewis family took a good newspaper, which they regularly passed over to the Windoms as soon as it had served

their own need. Dean and Dio were getting to be good readers, and not only was their knowledge of the Bible increasing daily, but their knowledge of all useful things. They were given lessons in arithmetic, and spent many hours in winter over the problems Miss Felicia had written out for them; for neither she nor they possessed a text-book, and now that the new farm was getting under way, and so many things needed to work and improve it, Miss Felicia had almost as little money at her command as they. Happily they possessed a small slate; and on this they worked by turns, though the cabin walls, and even the floor, bore marks of their zeal and industry. For it was apt to be the case that if one began to work at the problems, the zeal of the others was quickly aroused, and all wanted to do the same thing at once.

Miss Felicia had brought to her new home an old geography, for the sake of the maps it contained; and this she loaned, and from it taught them much concerning the great world in which they lived. She saw it rapidly wearing out with much use, but she made no complaint. The children were learning; and she had not bestowed

upon them motherly care, without being endowed with that motherly love and patience which is so nearly akin to the charity that "hopeth all things, endureth all things," and "never faileth."

Marvel was as eager to be taught as any of the children, and really learned a good deal, though he had no power of continued persistent effort. But he was much less disagreeable than of old, and it seemed as if he had given to Miss Felicia all that loyalty and devotion that had been developed only when it was too late to cheer or comfort his own mother.

One evening in September, Mr. Windom came in with that air of uncommon importance that he wore when he had a theme on which he intended to expatiate at some length. "There 's goin' to be a school-house built somewers about here," he began, and waited to view the effect of this important piece of news.

He was not disappointed in the amount of interest and excitement his tidings would arouse.

"O pa!" "Oh, is there?" "Won't that be splendid?" "Will there be a school in it, pa?" came from a chorus of voices.

"I reckon there will. What 's a school-house

for, if not to have a school in it? And I reckon it 'll be purty nigh home."

"How near?" "Where is it going to be?" from the chorus.

"Well, I told 'em as how if they was a mind to put it on that there little knoll, down the road apiece, I 'd give a deed of it to the deestrick as soon as ever I get my title, which I 'm a-goin' to see about right away. I 'd give 'em a bond for a deed now."

"How soon will they get it done?" asked Dio.

"Oh, 't won't take long. The neighbors is goin' to turn out and draw lumber to-morrer; we 'll have the frame up by the last of this week, and it 's the calculation to have it done so school can take up two weeks from Monday."

"Who 's going to be the teacher?" asked Dean.

"Miss Flishy, of course. One would think the deestrick would ruther have a man. I 'd have been glad to have teach'd it myself, though my work is kind o' pressin'; but then they 'll have money to pay the teacher off 'n the school-lands, and I might a managed it, seein' school 'll be mostly in the winter. It 'ud be quite an object. But no! — the neighbors all put in for Miss

Flishy, so I 'spose it 'll have to be so. If she 'd only know'd what was to her advantage" —

He left his sentence unfinished, and fell into a moody silence. The children rejoiced together over the good news.

"I 'm going to school," said Dio. "I don't mean to miss a day. I used to like going to school in Illinois."

"I want to go," said Dean with a little quaver in his voice, that showed that he realized how many obstacles there would be in his way.

"I 'm goin'," said Rolfe. "I have n't been to school hardly ever, 'cause I was always having the chills. I 'm goin' now."

"Spect Marv will have to be the one to stay home with the baby," said Felix, roused to take part in the conversation. "He never 'll make no scholard, nohow."

"I want to go!" howled Marvel. "I tell ye I 'm goin', too. No baby ain't goin' to keep me to home."

Little Martha, who had been running about at her play, now came to Marvel and clasped his knees, and laid her little fair face upon them.

She had learned to love Marvel, and he was fond of her, but now he looked at her coldly.

"I don't see what we can do," said Dean. "We 'll all want to go so bad. But we all love little Mattie, don't we, Marv?"

Marvel looked hard and uncompromising. He would not answer, even by a nod. He sat in sullen silence, resisting the little coaxing face that was still pressing against his knees.

"Maybe we can take her. She 's so good and quiet. Or, if not, I will stay with her my part of the time," said Dean.

"I 'll take my turn staying, if Marv will," said Dio, with unusual self-sacrifice. "We won't grudge to take care of the poor little thing. What would ma think of you, Marv?"

Marvel broke down at this, and howled again, this time in repentant mood. He drew little Martha up into his arms and kissed her, saying, —

"Yes, yes! Marv will. He 'll stay at home and take care of baby. He 'll do it for ma, — and he 'll do it for baby, — and he 'll do it for Jesus. Marv was bad, — bad! Marv is sorry."

"We 'll all take our turns," said Dean cheer-

fully. "It won't be but a little while before she can go too."

"Shall you go to draw lumber to-morrow, pa?" asked Dio.

"No; my wagon ain't strong enough to draw lumber with. I promised to work at the mill some, to help pay for shingles for the roof."

Felix had managed to compass the ownership of a horse and wagon, both in rather dilapidated condition, but capable of some service. He had purchased a cow too, who was also "on her last legs," but she had brought them a fine heifer calf, which was now well grown, and quite independent of her old mother, feeding upon the prairie grass, and giving promise of usefulness by and by. She was a great pet with all the children.

The new school-house was pushed forward rapidly. It was a joyful day when school began, and the children came from near and far, bringing books of all sorts, from the ancient blue-covered Webster's spelling-book, down to the modern readers and spellers.

Miss Felicia welcomed all, and accommodated herself to any circumstances, organizing as best she could; eager to make the school a delight and

a blessing to the children who had enjoyed so meager advantages. She would not hear to either of the Windom children staying out on little Martha's account. "Bring her to school, and we'll see what we can do," she said.

And little Martha soon learned to be as quiet as a mouse in the schoolroom. Sometimes she grew sleepy; and then Miss Felicia made her a bed on one of the seats, by spreading shawls and extra garments upon it. Sometimes she was turned out to play about the door a little while. She was never any trouble.

The winter was a mild one, and passed rapidly and delightfully. Dean and Dio had to rise very early to get the breakfast out of the way, and all the children ready for school; but this necessity developed in them more energy and forethought about their work, which would be a great advantage to them in their future lives. The evenings also were full of work; for there was always mending to do for themselves or the others, that all might go to school in some degree of decency.

Mr. Windom had more work than usual at the mill, so that he was able to keep the family pretty comfortable.



Dean made great strides in learning. He soon outstripped all the others, so that he had to be alone in his classes, but this only gave him the more freedom to go on at his own pace. Miss Felicia delighted to push him forward, as do most teachers the scholar who needs no urging.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## DIO'S OFFER.

It was early June. School was done. One lovely Sabbath morning Marvel, Dean, and Dio were all out upon the prairie very early, looking for the cow. That wayward creature, finding the tender green grass and clear water sufficient for all her needs, and her milk but a trifling burden, had neglected to go home as usual the previous night, nor could she be found for all their searching. They had each taken different routes, and Dio's brought her out upon an old road known as the Mission Road, where she stood on a slight rise of the ground to look around her. Bareheaded and barefooted, brown as a chestnut, but comely with the bloom of health, strong, lithe, and tall, Dio stood and watched the coming of a double team with shining buggy, in which were two men. There was so little passing in the neighborhood, that the sight of a traveler was always interesting.

As they drew near, Dio put on the bonnet that

had been hanging round her neck, and, unwilling to seem to be standing there simply to watch their coming, began to follow the road slowly. They passed her, turned to look back, and finally stopped and beckoned her to come near. "Is this the old Mission Road to Osage?" asked one of the men.

"Yes, sir," said Dio.

"H'm! Say, young woman, don't you want a place in Elm City where you can earn good wages?—an easy place; no hard work."

Dio's heart gave a bound. "Exactly what I do want!" she thought within herself.

"Three dollars a week, and good board," continued the man.

"What is the work?" asked Dio.

"Well, it 's in a grocery store. I want you to tend bar."

"Bar-tender in a grocery store?" said Dio, bewildered. "I did n't know they had bars in grocery stores."

"There is in this one. You 've only to stand behind a counter in a cozy little corner, where you won't be seen by every one that comes in, and measure out the drinks, and take the change. You can make change, can't you?"

"Yes," said Dio rather hesitatingly; for she was not very quick at figures, and feared she might hardly be equal to the work. That was her only thought of fear.

"It 's largely a matter of practice. You 'd soon get the knack of it, if you 're not very quick at first," said the man, as if reading her thoughts. "I 'm not altogether ready for you yet; expect to open up next week. Think you 'll come?"

"I should n't wonder," said Dio. "I must ask my father. But I reckon he 'll let me come."

"All right. Just drop me a line. Here 's my card;" and he threw Dio a card, which she picked up and studied in a whirl of excitement as the team rattled on out of sight.

Dio went home as if her feet had wings. She forgot all about the cow. But Dean had found her, and driven her home a few minutes before Dio got there. She told her story in breathless haste.

"The' ain't none of my girls goin' to sell liquor, — not even in a grocery store," declared Felix, bringing down his fist upon the table with a blow that made the breakfast dishes dance. "I know too much about them places."

Dio's radiant face clouded at this. But she was bent upon going. Three dollars a week seemed a great sum to her. And she was accustomed to getting her way with her father, and she did not despair.

"Three dollars a week is a heap of money," she said. "In four weeks I 'd get twelve dollars. Just think of that, pa."

"Yes; 't is a heap o' money, but where would it go to? I know the ways o' the sex. Jest as soon as they begin to earn money, they begin to put it onto their own backs, and then they get too stuck-up to speak civil to their own fathers. Ye ain't goin' to tend bar in no grocery store, Dio Windom."

"I should n't do that way, pa. I should send it home. I should have to have things sometimes, of course. I felt 'shamed most to death to stand there barefoot, talking to such fine gentlemen. A big girl like me, barefoot!" said Dio scornfully. "Better get me some shoes, if you don't want me to go away to work."

"Besides that," she began again after a little silence, "I should n't have to be right out in sight of folks. He said I was to sit in

a quiet little corner where would n't many see me."

"Did he? That ain't quite so bad," said her father. "Spect ye might get along on half the money, and send the other half home, could n't ye?"

"Yes, indeed," said Dio eagerly.

"What do you suppose ma would think about it, Dio?" said Dean, seeing that his father was weakening in his opposition.

"How should I know? I never heard her say a word about it, and I don't believe you did either," said Dio hotly.

"No, I never heard her say; but I know what she would think."

"Do let us have breakfast. I 'm ready to drop with hunger," said Dio, willing to change the subject for the present.

Marvel had been milking the cow. He came in at this moment, bringing the milk, and they were soon seated about the table. But a new subject of interest did not often arise, and was not to be quickly set aside. They talked it over all breakfast-time. Dean urged the plea that his mother would never have liked to let Dio go, and

that he knew the man could n't be a good man, or he would n't be riding round on Sunday. This argument Felix rejected contemptuously.

"Folks are obleeged to do things of a Sunday, sometimes," said he. "Circumstances of a very pressin' natur' makes it necessary."

"There 's folks as won't be pressed," said Marvel. "I know em."

"And they get on just as well, — better I reckon," said Dean.

"The Holts nor the Lewises won't work of a Sunday, whatever comes of it," said Dio. "And they get on better 'n we do."

"Of all the girls ever I see!" said her father indignantly. "When I was just a-workin' over to yer side, ye go and put yer oar in agin me. Don't ye understand nothin' about the bearin's o' things?"

"I was just thinking," said Dio.

Breakfast being over, there was no more time for talking. It was later than usual, and they all made hasty preparation for Sabbath-school. They no longer had to ride four miles; for since the accessions to their neighborhood, and the building of the school-house, the services had been held

there, and it was but a short walk. So each took his own way thither at his own convenience or pleasure. Dean and Dio walked together, with little Martha between them. They walked in silence for a while, till Dean broke it with, —

“Don’t go, Twinnie! I can’t have you go.”

This pet name of their childhood had fallen into disuse of late. It only came out under stress of deep feeling. It rarely failed to touch Dio’s heart when it came. She made no reply to Dean’s appeal for a while, but walked on with a sober face. They were near the school-house.

“You won’t, will you?” said he persuasively.

“I think we ’re awful poor,” said Dio; “shameful poor. Look at my shoes! If I should wear them one week-day, I should n’t have a thing to go to Sabbath-school in. I should just have to stay at home. And pa won’t ever get me a hat with ribbons, like other girls wear.”

“I wish I could earn money,” sighed Dean. “But I would n’t do *that* to earn it,” he added with energy, after a minute’s pause.

“Why not? I think it ’ll be real easy work,” said Dio.



"So do I. But when I work I 'm going to do something that 'll do folks good, — not make them bad."

Dio was silent. "I 'm going to ask Miss Felicia," said she at length. "If she says just as you do, I won't go. Miss Felicia knows how awful it is for a girl not ever to have anything new, and she won't say for me to stay at home when I have a chance to earn money, unless" — She hesitated, not liking to allow that Miss Felicia might think it a bad way to earn money. But Dean was more than satisfied with this promise.

"All right! Ask her!" said he, brightening up. "Miss Felicia knows!"

Dio could hardly wait to know Miss Felicia's verdict. Her first plan had been to walk home with her from the Sunday-school, but there were two objections to this procedure. Miss Felicia would perhaps say, "I should like your company, Dio, but who 'll get dinner at your home, if you come away?" Dio knew Dean could and would get it without a murmur, but she also knew what Miss Felicia thought of her leaving her own proper duties for Dean to perform.

Or, it might be she would say, "I 'd rather not hear about any business matter on Sunday, Dio. I want the whole of my Sabbath for the business of religion, and I 'd rather not hear anything that 'll set me thinking about week-day matters."

Dio thought Miss Felicia was pretty strict. Nevertheless she liked her, and trusted her, and patterned after her.

So she walked back, as she had come, with Dean, telling him these thoughts as they walked.

"I never once thought of that," said Dean soberly.

"Thought of what?" asked Dio.

"Why, that it was week-day business, and we better not talk about it on Sunday."

"Oh, we could n't help it," said Dio. "It came to us on Sunday, and of course we talked about it."

"I wonder what Miss Felicia would have done if such a thing came to her on Sunday," said Dean meditatively.

"She would say, 'Time enough to-morrow to think about that,' and shut her mouth up tight," said Dio, laughing. "But I don't believe I could."

"We always can do what we ought to do, I reckon," said Dean.

Miss Felicia had trained Dio to her ways as much as possible, and she thought the only proper time to do the washing was early Monday morning. Dio always felt a little ashamed, therefore, to be found washing any other day. But she had frequent hindrances. Sometimes her father neglected to bring home any soap. He always bought things in very small quantities, and yet he always seemed surprised to know that the supply was exhausted. And sometimes the washing had to be put off because he called upon all hands to come out and give him some help as soon as breakfast was over Monday morning. Dio liked to work out-doors. She would far rather drop corn, or set up wheat sheaves, than wash clothes. But then after the out-door work was over, the washing still had to be done. Dio was lately growing more certain to take this into account, and often she declined to go out and leave her own proper work to suffer. So Monday morning found her busy at the wash-tub, and it was not till the middle of the afternoon that she was free to go over to see her friend. By this

time her mind was about made up as to what she might expect. She had small hope that Miss Felicia would advise her to take the offered situation. She was not mistaken. Miss Felicia heard all her pleas, and then, with her kind, serious eyes on Dio's face, said simply, "But you don't mean to go, Dio?"

"I suppose not. At first I thought I would, and that nothing should hinder me. It would be so pleasant to have money to buy things."

"Yes; so it would. But we don't want money earned in a hateful, wicked business, do we, Dio? We'd a great deal rather go without things than to get them in such a way. Drinking makes men wicked and selfish, and cruel to their families. We won't help it on in any way. No wonder they put the person who sells it in a quiet corner where they will be out of sight. That's because it is a work of darkness. They're ashamed and ought to be ashamed of selling it.

"There's another reason why you should n't go," said she, after a little pause. "You are needed at home. I know the money would be a help to the folks at home, as well as to you, but it would n't do half as much good as you can do.

You, the oldest daughter, must fill your mother's place to those three little girls. If your heavenly Father had wanted Dean to do such work, and leave you free to go away, or to work out-doors, Dean would have been the girl, and you a boy. You must try to be just what God meant you to be."

This was no new doctrine from Miss Felicia's lips. Dio had heard it all before. She was getting it by heart, as her wise friend meant she should. She sighed a little over her vanishing hopes of going out into the world to seek her fortune, saying, —

"You don't know how hard it is, Miss Felicia. If pa would give me some money sometimes, and let me buy my own things, it would n't be so bad. He buys whatever's the cheapest, if it's ever so ugly looking."

"He will, one of these days," said Miss Felicia soothingly. "Think how many things he has had to buy to get a start on the farm, — team, tools, stock, and everything."

"We have n't near all we need yet," said Dio despondently. "We borrow and borrow of your father, till I should think he'd be all out of patience."

"We 're willing to lend whenever we can," said Miss Felicia. "Cheer up, dearie! There 'll be better times by and by. Marvel and Dean are growing older and stronger all the time. They are getting to be quite good farmers. Your wheat looks well this year."

Dio went home not wholly determined to stay there and do her duty to her family and to God, but discerning clearly that it was her duty. Her imagination still looked longingly out into the wide world, and its possibilities seemed grander and more alluring than anything in the daily round of tasks that made up her life at home.

Nevertheless, the influence of Miss Felicia and Dean, and the thought of her dead mother's last charge to her, were so powerful that she wrote upon the postal-card, with which Miss Felicia had supplied her, a single line declining the situation. When she had signed and addressed it with much care and painstaking, she laid it away, ready to be carried to the post-office, with the feeling that she was renouncing her first and only chance, and was not likely soon to have another; and yet with a strange new sensation of gladness in doing what she knew was right.

She said nothing concerning her decision till the card was dispatched by means of a passing neighbor. When her father was told, and found that the answer had already gone, he seemed quite vexed.

"I would n't a done it, — not till we had talked it over some more, anyhow," said he. "Twelve dollars a month don't grow on every bush."

"But, pa, you said I should n't go!" said Dio.

"Well, what if I did? I had n't fairly weighed the indoosement. The indoosement is what I 'm thinkin' of. Such a chance won't come agin in a hurry. Don't talk to me about shoes and clo'es, Diodema, if yer 've let this chance go by."

"We don't want to do what 's wrong for any inducement," said Dean.

"Oh, ye 're jest like yer ma, and ye 're always a-goin' to be! Always standin' right acrost the track, when a body wants to get ahead!"

"Ma was real good!" said Dio with indignation. "I should like to be as good as she was."

Felix retired behind his newspaper, and vouchsafed no reply.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## SHOPPING.

THE summer passed. The wheat was harvested, and it was really a good crop. It brought money enough to give Felix Windom and every one of his children a good winter outfit, besides supplying some other necessities.

Dean, prompted perhaps by Miss Felicia, begged his father to reward Dio's faithfulness to home duties by giving her the money to purchase her own and the little girls' clothes.

"I reckon I know how to buy dresses better 'n a girl fifteen year old, as hain't never had no exper'ence whatsoever," said Felix. "I ain't goin' to do no sech a thing."

"But, pa, she ought to learn to buy her own things sometime. How is she ever going to get experience, if she never has any money to spend?"

"She might a had money to spend if she had n't done foolish about that grocery store," said Felix doggedly.



Dean was silent, feeling not a little disheartened at his father's persistent refusal to acknowledge the wisdom of Dio's decision, or the advantage to them all of her remaining at home. But he would not give up the point at issue, without more effort. So he went on, —

“Think how much more work I 've done outdoors this summer than I ever did before. If Dio had gone away, I should have had to stay in the house and work a great deal more.”

“Wall, some more, maybe. But Lavinie is gettin' a big girl. She could do most as much as Diodema, if she was put to it. And she must be. Dio 's old enough to go out to work somewers, and she 's got to. Think what a family for a poor man, — seven child'en!”

“O pa!” said Dean deprecatingly.

“I tell yer what 't is, Dean, ye don't never seem to set a proper vally on money. I 've always noticed in some things ye 're ready to go right agin yer own intrists. Don't ye know, boy, as money is the greatest power in this here world? It jest beats the steam-injine all holler, every time. In fact, it 's the power that makes the steam-injine go; for how could they build rail-

roads without money: tell me that! Take my advice, Dean, and git money. Religion is all well enough. Nobody don't respect religion more 'n I do; but don't let it be a hendrance, — never go in deep enough to let it be a hendrance. That 's my advice, and ye have it free gratis, boy."

Felix's thumbs were in his vest pockets now, and he was in for a long speech. Dean was patient, for he knew that whatever effect his father's speeches had upon the listeners, they served one good end, namely to put himself in good-humor. With every good point which he imagined he made, his self-complacency rose. But Dean could not listen in silence.

"I don't believe God thinks so much of money," said he. "Miss Felicia says the best folks are not generally the richest, and if money was such a good thing, God would give the most to the best folks, I 'm sure."

"It is n't easy to prognoscitate what our Creator's plans and purposes is," said Felix. "I reckon he has n't made 'em known to you, nor Miss Flishy, no more 'n he has to me. He 's put us into this here world, and he expects us to make a livin', and that 's wot I 'm a tryin' to do. I

don't reckon he consarns himself so everlastinly about the little things we do or don't do, so as we don't go into no rampageous wickedness."

Dean felt shocked and grieved at his father's views, but he was too inexperienced to argue with him to much purpose. He only replied by asking, —

"Won't you give Dio some money and let her go to town with Miss Felicia, and get the things she and the children need? Do, pa!"

Felix being now in good humor, drew from his pocket a long narrow bag made of chamois skin, and untying the cord that closed it, drew out a little roll of bills. He spread out on his knee two fives and a two dollar bill, and fingered them meditatively, while Dean watched him with eager anxiety.

He began to count. "One, two, three, four, five, — five pair o' shoes, and four dresses. I reckon them ought to come out of a ten. There, take it all, and don't never say I ain't a liberal-minded man. And tell Diodema she must make it go as fur as I would."

Dean took the twelve dollars with great joy. He gave it, with the message to Dio, whose face

grew quite sober with the weight of responsibility.

Yet it was a day of joyful excitement when she rode to Elm City with Miss Felicia, with her money and four little sticks of varying lengths in her pocket, the measures of four pairs of feet that were for the first time in their experience to be newly shod at the same time. As they rode along they made careful calculation as to the amount that would be left after the shoes were purchased, and what could and should be done with it. Miss Felicia was well qualified to advise; for she knew what was needed quite as well as Dio, and she knew far better what things would cost, and what materials were most suitable.

There was nothing very exciting about a shoe-store, and Dio was calm and self-possessed while the shoes were under consideration. But when they came into the dry-goods store, where pretty calicoes strewed the counters, and ribbons, and laces, and fine handkerchiefs dangled from overhead, and flannels, and merinos in all colors lay piled before her, Dio's plans and purposes were all forgotten, and she was in a state of delighted

bewilderment. It was well that Miss Felicia was at her side, and knew her own mind exactly, and was able to call for just the right things, and to decide for wear and utility, against brilliancy of color, or unworthiness of texture. She held Dio to her first idea, against the new ones that came thronging at sight of so many kinds from which to choose.

Dio's father had been accustomed to buy one piece of calico from which all his daughters were to be clothed. This method had been intensely disagreeable to Dio, both in the making and the wearing, and she was determined to buy something different for each child. So her selections were a work of time. Miss Felicia was patient and interested, leaving Dio free to follow her own fancies so long as they were not seriously amiss.

The last purchase to be made was a hat for Dio. The one she was wearing was the loan of her friend. Dio had determined to have one of her own if possible. To this end she had planned, and though there was but little money left, she found that the round brown straw she coveted was within her means, and also a yard of

ribbon to put on it. There was yet a little left, and Miss Felicia advised the purchase of a hat for Vinnie, and out of her own pocket bought a bit of ribbon to trim it. Dio came out of the store with her heart full of joy, and her arms full of bundles.

Miss Felicia had her own errands to do, and when they had disposed Dio's packages safely under the wagon seat, they began again. Dio tried to help her friend in turn, and learned much from her as to the best ways of shopping. If it be true that those who have gone from earth are sometimes allowed a look at the dear ones left behind, and Dio's mother could have seen her child, just budding into womanhood, rosy and happy with the excitement of her grand business that day, yet pliant and yielding to the wise friend who was so much to her, she would surely have said with a thankful heart, "My Lord, in whose care I left the child, with such fear and trembling, thou hast done for her far more, and better, than I could have done. Blessed be thy holy name!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## EARNING MONEY.

DEAN did not forget what his father had said about Dio leaving home to earn money. He occasionally thought of it with uneasiness. Somehow Dean had gotten the idea that a girl of fifteen was safest and happiest in her own home, even though that home was not all that could be desired, and a good many older and wiser than he are of the same opinion. Dean hoped his father had spoken in a mood of restlessness or discouragement, and would not refer to it again. So it came like a blow upon a sore place, when Dio came out one evening while he was milking the cow, and stood beside him to say, —

“Dean, pa wants me to go away to work.”

“Oh no, Dio, I reckon pa don’t mean it! He says such things once in awhile, but we can’t spare you. Why, who would do the housework?”

“He says Vinnie is big enough. He says I could earn two dollars a week, and maybe more,

and he wants to get money so he can have a pair of horses. He needs them I know, and lots of other things. And he says with seven children hanging on to him" —

"If he says that Mary and I are hanging on to him when we do almost all the farm work," interrupted Dean indignantly, "or you, doing all the housework, for Vinnie does n't and can't do much," — he broke off suddenly for fear of saying a thing about his father that he ought not to say.

"Pa does n't care how the house looks, or how dirty and ragged the children are, if things keep along somehow, and he gets ahead," said Dio bitterly.

Dean was silent; for he could not dispute, and he would not confirm, this statement.

"Not but what I 'd be glad enough to go," Dio continued, "if I could get a good place. But to leave Lottie and Mattie with nobody but pa and Vinnie to look after them seems just wicked."

To this Dean assented, and then another silence followed, while perplexed and troubled eyes followed unconsciously the streams of milk as they fell into the pail.

"You ought to go to school. I want you to go



till you know all Miss Felicia can teach you. If you leave off now you 'll never have any more chance. I should think you might get so as to teach a school after awhile. That 's what I should like. I 'll talk to pa, and see if I can't persuade him. I 'm sure going away to work now is n't the best thing for you, and, — I should miss you, awful, Twinnie!"

By this time the milking was finished, and the cow had been allowed to walk away to feed upon the grass, while they still lingered to talk. For answer to this outbreak of feeling Dio just kneeled on the prairie beside her brother, and put one arm round his neck, and hugged him tightly.

"I should miss you too. I wish we could both go, — if it was n't for the little ones."

"I don't see how we can go rightly," said Dean.

"Nobody but pa would ever think of such a thing," said Dio. "He needs us both at home, to keep things decent. But I 'm not going to stay to be twitted of hanging on to him." Dio's tone was bitter, and her face dark and flushed with anger. Dean did not like to see it so.

"We won't speak hard of him, will we, dear?"

Because he 's our father, and there 's a commandment, you know. I don't wonder he wants money to get a double team and tools. I want it too. But I don't want to spare my Twinnie for the best pair of mules that ever stepped. I hope pa will think better of it. He often says things, and does n't do them."

"But he means this. He 's spoken to me twice, lately, about it," said Dio. "I 've talked to Miss Felicia, and I know she has talked to him; but it did n't do any good, for he says if Miss Felicia don't know what 's for her own interest, probably she don't know what 's for his. He don't ever get over her not coming here to live. I don't wonder she would n't!"

"Nor I," said Dean getting up and taking the stool in one hand, and the milk-pail in the other, preparatory to going in. "Dio, dearie, we 'll pray about it. I have already, some; but I 'll pray harder, and you will too, won't you?"

Dio nodded, and Dean continued. "*Freely*, you know! That word always makes me think of ma, and somehow makes my faith strong. He has freely helped us so often that I 'm sure he will do whatever is best for us now. And if it 's

going away, why, he can take care of you anywhere. I'm going to pray, and then trust him."

Dean did not fail to talk with his father, but it was to no purpose. Felix was determined to have a double team, and he saw no way of getting one without help from some quarter; and he was in that mood that opposition to his plans made him all the more obstinate.

At last Dean said to him, "If Dio goes, pa, I think maybe I'd better go too. If I can get a place near her, and look after her some, and earn money too, we can come home the quicker. Won't that be a good plan?"

"I don't reckon ye 'll find anything to do. There 's more call for girls to do housework. They say house help is skerce. But if ye can find a place ye can go. Marv and I can do all there is left to do this fall. 'T would be a good thing if ye could be earnin' money. All the neighbors is gettin' ahead of us. The Williamsses has got a new mower and reaper. The Boyds has bought a fine pair o' mules. The Lewises is goin' to build an addition to their house this fall. I want to get ahead! That 's what I want. And

nobody can't make no headway 'thout a good team."

"Well then, pa, Dio and I will go to town some day soon, and see what can be done."

Neither Dean nor Dio was very happy over this conclusion. The thought of leaving the little ones, through the winter, to such care as they would get from their father and Vinnie seemed like forsaking the work solemnly laid upon them by their dead mother. Dio could hardly understand how it was that Dean, who was not forced to go, could think it best for himself. For her there seemed no choice. She did not understand that to Dean the real dangers to which the little ones would be exposed, in their own home, with Miss Felicia near in case of sickness or serious trouble, seemed trifling compared to those that might beset her, in her youth and inexperience, alone, in a strange city. The duty Dean felt imposed upon him now was guarding Dio.

Miss Felicia drove them to town, and, assisted by her, a situation was easily found for Dio. In fact, household service was in great demand; and she found she could readily command three

dollars a week, being well grown and strong, and not unskilful in common work, thanks to her good friend. She had come prepared to stay; and her brother and Miss Felicia left her to take her place in the large, light kitchen of a handsome house. Of the inmates they knew no more than that the head of the family was a merchant tailor doing a good business, and there were but four in the family. Dio was expected to do most of the work, but with so few to work for she thought that could not be very hard. They left her looking bright and hopeful.

Dean found it much less easy to find a situation for himself. Miss Felicia waited for him as long as she could, and then left him to walk home should he fail altogether of finding a place. Shortly after she took leave of him he was offered a situation as waiter in a hotel, but that was not the kind of work he wanted. He would at least try farther.

After spending most of the day in a vain search, an opening came as if by accident, though Dean did not think it was accident, when he was all the time looking up to his heavenly Father for guidance and help. He was just coming out of a

hardware store where they "had all the help they needed," when a man drove up and stopped before the door in a wagon, marked "James Budd, Repair Shop."

The man had a genial, honest face, and a brisk hearty manner of speaking. He exchanged a few words with the proprietor of the store, who was still standing in the door, and was turning to go away when the hardware man called after him.

"Say, Budd! You don't want to hire a boy, do you?"

"Why, yes!" was the ready answer. "That 's exactly what I do want. Meant to have asked if you knew of any likely young fellow."

"All right! there he is," pointing to Dean, who advanced eagerly. "Should n't wonder if you two might suit one another."

What he saw about Dean, or what he knew about James Budd, to cause him to make this speech was not apparent; but Dean looked hopefully into the face of the stranger, and the stranger looked scrutinizingly into the face of the boy.

"You want a place to work? Been used to work with machinery?"

"I never had a chance," said Dean. "I 've lived at home, on a farm. I 'd like to try, though."

"H'm — your father does n't live in town then. I want a boy that can board at home."

Dean's hopes fell. He made no reply.

"We don't usually pay a boy more than enough for his board to begin with," said the man, still watching Dean's face sharply.

Dean's hopes fell still more. What would his father say to that? In the hotel he could earn as much as Dio, and his board besides. He had not much idea of the nature of the work he would have to do in the repair-shop, but there was strong fascination for him in the word machinery. He saw that the man had some kind of a machine, or a part of one, in the back part of his long wagon. He looked at it curiously. He wanted to work where he would be learning something, and he did not want to go into the hotel. Perhaps the purple face and strongly scented breath of the hotel-keeper with whom he had talked, and the clean honest face of James Budd, made some of the difference in his feelings. He would gladly have accepted almost any terms offered by

Mr. Budd, but for the recollection that he must satisfy his father.

"I ought to earn more than my board," said he after a little pause, during which Mr. Budd seemed to wait for his answer. "I am afraid my father won't let me stay if I can't. He needs me on the farm, but he wants the money."

"I might take you a week on trial. If I find you quick and handy, and I can afford to keep you and pay you, say two dollars a week and board, — how would that do?"

"I 'll come!" said Dean. "I 'll come, and do my best."

"All right. You can go right home with me now, if you 're ready. We 're crowded with work just at this time, and the sooner you come the better."

"I 'm all ready," said Dean.

The twilight hour saw Dean kneeling by a clean bed in a little attic room in James Budd's house, giving thanks for the kindness that had guided him and Dio to situations where they could see each other sometimes, and be learning, while satisfying their father's demands.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## A NEW SUIT OF CLOTHES.

DEAN'S week of trial being ended, Mr. Budd showed that he was satisfied by engaging him for six months. Contrary to his usual custom, he continued to board him in his own family. Mrs. Budd was a delicate little woman, and the care of her five children was burden enough for her. But she had found that Dean, so far from being an additional burden, was actually a help. He was so pleasant with the children, so willing to give a lift anywhere, whenever he was in the house, that the matter of looking up a boarding-place for him was deferred, and finally ceased to be thought of.

Harry, Mr. Budd's oldest son, without being actually a bad boy, had lately been wild and restive, and inclined to seek the society of older, and not always better boys. Harry seemed to find pleasure in Dean's company. Dean was boyish and yet manly. Older by two years, he was

so keenly interested in everything pertaining to his new situation, that Harry found him ready to appreciate and enjoy anything and everything that was innocent or worthy, and there was something about him that forbade the idea of attempting to introduce him to evil.

Mr. Budd watched the two boys together when they were unconscious of his presence, and he soon came to the conclusion that his son could not be in safer company than that of his new assistant. He made no remarks, but he quietly arranged to keep Harry at Dean's side whenever he was in the shop. He wished to train his son to his own business, and during this hurried season he expected him to rise early and work an hour or two before school. He had vainly tried to awaken in him some interest and enthusiasm about the work. Now Harry performed his task manfully in emulation of his new friend.

As time passed Mr. Budd began to see how, by means of Dean, he could get Harry into certain society that he much desired for him. But first Dean must be suitably dressed. Mr. Budd proposed to advance the necessary money, and allow

Dean to repay it gradually by his work. To his surprise Dean objected.

"I 've got to send money to my father," he said. "He needs it, and I promised. I can sit in the back pews at church, and nobody will mind me much."

This did not exactly suit his employer. Harry liked better to stay at home, and lounge and read, than to go to church; and only his father's authority kept him in regular attendance. Mr. Budd hoped, through Dean, to win him to a real interest in church and Sabbath-school. But Harry was somewhat proud. He would not sit with Dean in his working-clothes, in a back seat. There were other places where Dean might go, and lead Harry if he could. Not that the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor or the Young Men's Christian Association would object to a member appearing in his working-clothes, but for Harry's sake Dean must not go so. Mr. Budd was determined that the new suit should come, though it came out of his own pocket. He told Dean plainly that he wished him to have a new suit. Dean looked troubled.

"How much ought it to cost?" he asked.

"Not less than twenty dollars will fit you out as you need to be," said Mr. Budd.

"I have to send my father a dollar and a half a week," said Dean in a low voice, and not liking to meet his employer's eye, he felt so abashed at the necessity of explaining to one almost a stranger all his circumstances. "I promised him half my wages."

"A dollar a week would be half," said Mr. Budd.

"Yes, sir. But I might have had a place where I should have earned three dollars a week, so I thought I must send him a dollar and a half," said Dean.

"Why did you refuse a better place and take this at less money?" said Mr. Budd.

"Because I did n't like the work so well or the man," said Dean, with no thought of flattery, whatever his words implied. He explained what situation had been offered him. Mr. Budd made no reply. He was not displeased with Dean, but he was perplexed. He had his own ideas as to what was wise in managing boys. He would not make a pauper of his young workman by giving him the needed outfit, and he liked little

better to encourage him to anticipate all his wages for so long a time as would be necessary.

He thought of offering Dean extra pay for extra work, but he was mindful of the old adage about all work and no play making a dull boy, and Dean was quite grave enough already. He would not have him dull. He wished, too, to give him time to spend with Harry. More work would not do. He said no more at that time, but like a wise man determined to consult his wife. Her woman's wit would find some way. He did so that evening.

"You think he is earning all you give him?" she asked.

"Yes. But I can't offer him more. The bargain was for six months, and it must stand as it is. Business is business. To advance before the time is out would be contrary to all rule."

"Pshaw!" said the little woman. "Just as though a man could n't pay his workmen exactly as he pleases. That's some Trades Union nonsense, I know. But I'm not going to try to batter down that mountain. I've tried too often, and I know it's of no use."

Mr. Budd smiled. "Then think of some other way," he said. "You can, I'm sure."

Thus complimented the wife set her wits at work.

"There's a dark blue suit of my brother's, — poor Maurice, — hanging up-stairs. He left it here before he went to sea the last time. It would n't begin to fit Dean, but the cloth is good enough to make over. It's quite a job to rip it all to pieces and get it ready for the tailor, but perhaps I can do it."

"Let the boy rip it himself. Sell it to him just as it is, as cheap as you dare offer it. Then we can make out the rest. I'll pay for the making, and buy him the other things he needs, and the whole won't come to so much that he can't pay it all back in three months, and satisfy his father too. And now and then perhaps I can give him and Harry a job to do together, by which to earn a little pocket-money."

"You can't do better than that, as I see," said Mrs. Budd.

Dean was consulted; and as this arrangement fully satisfied him, he was soon in suitable trim to go anywhere Mr. Budd wished.

## CHAPTER XX.

## OVERWORKED.

DIO soon found that in that large, pleasant kitchen there were a great many things to be done. And not only there, but all over the large, handsome house. The mistress, finding her quick to learn, and willing, — for three dollars a week seemed such large pay to the inexperienced girl that she felt that she must not complain, no matter how much was laid upon her, — taught her to do one thing after another, till she was relieved of nearly every household duty, and could give her time to her dress, her novel, and her baby. It is proper to mention the baby last, as it was mainly intrusted to a little colored girl who was its nurse.

Often Dio worked from early dawn till eight or nine at night, with scarcely a moment's rest. Even her meal-times were frequently interrupted with requests to leave off "just a minute," to run to the corner grocery for a cigar for her master, or

to do some trifling errand to save her mistress' steps. She was never spoken to roughly or unkindly, and in everything her services were requested rather than commanded. But the requests were very many, and exacting. Dean came often to see her. But it was poor consolation to sit and watch her hurrying on her work, and scarcely feeling that she dared sit beside him long enough to hear all he had to tell her. For herself, there was not much to tell. It was a nice place, and they were kind to her. She never thought of making complaint.

She had plenty of clothes. Mrs. Lapham never half wore out her things; and she would gladly have paid her help altogether out of her own wardrobe, only that Dio insisted that she must have some money to send to her father. Dio was rather pleased with the cast-off finery that she got so cheap. It was much more elaborate than anything she had ever aspired to before, and she did not realize that it was not half as becoming as simpler clothing suited to her years and station would have been. Every time Dean came she had a new dress, or sacque, or hat to show him. And at first Dean thought



it was all right, though he was troubled that Dio had so much to do that she could never go with him to church, prayer-meeting, or lecture.

But as time passed, and, by repeated visits, he found it was always to be the same, and there never could be time for rest, or social enjoyment, or improvement of any kind, he began to feel that it was all wrong. His Dio was growing pale and thin, and her bright eyes were not so glad and shining when she came out to meet him; and sometimes she cried when he came, and said she was tired and wanted to go home. Her fine clothes were not suited to her work: often they would not bear washing, though it was needful, and he could not help contrasting the forlorn, bedraggled appearance of his sister, with that of the bright, tidy, cheery maid of all work, who, in her neat calicoes and gingham, ruled over Mrs. Budd's kitchen.

One evening Dean, accompanied by Harry, came prepared to insist upon taking his sister to a young people's prayer-meeting. He had found these meetings so pleasant and so profitable that he felt it to be intolerable that Dio should never be able to enjoy them with him. He found her

busily engaged in polishing her master's shoes, while a sink full of dishes awaited her washing. Preparations for the morning's early breakfast were yet to be made, and moreover the master and mistress were to be away till late at an evening party, and Dio must not leave the house, as they could not wholly trust the little nurse.

Harry did not enter the kitchen; but the door had been left open, and he saw and heard all, and when Dean came out, disappointed, he said, —

“It's too bad, Dean. Those Laphams impose upon your sister. Why, there are not half a dozen girls in town that are expected to do such work as blacking their master's shoes. When folks keep only one girl they expect to do such things themselves. I wonder what mother would say, if we proposed to put such work upon Tina.”

“Dio certainly has too much to do,” said Dean. “Her eyes look tired all the time.”

“No girl ought to work every minute. Why, Tina has time to read some, and sew, besides going out one or two evenings in the week. And we never ask her to stay from church to get a hot dinner on Sundays. Mother plans it all, and has it almost all cooked, and ready on Saturday, and

she and Tina can have it on the table in a few minutes after we get home from meeting. She has one afternoon in the week all to herself, to go out, or to sew, as she likes. All girls at service have that."

"The Laphams generally have company on Sunday, and Dio says it's the hardest day in the week," said Dean. "I wish Dio could live with somebody like your mother."

"She can find a better place than that, if she wants to," said Harry.

The thought of finding a better place for Dio having once entered Dean's mind was not dismissed, but was turned over and over. But he concluded to have a talk with Mrs. Lapham first. The opportunity soon came. The next time he went to see Dio she was out, and Mrs. Lapham let him in.

"You want to see Dio, I suppose. She will be at home in a few minutes. She is only gone to the corner grocery," said she.

"If you please, Mrs. Lapham, I want to see you. Can you give me a few minutes?" said Dean.

"I suppose so. You may come into the dining-room. What is it?"

"I wanted to speak about Dio," said Dean, not without some perturbation. "She works too hard, I think."

"She has never complained," said Mrs. Lapham coldly. "I don't see how the work can be very hard in this small family."

"I don't see, either, ma'am. She did the work for eight of us at home, and kept as blithe as a cricket. But somehow she is always at work here. She never gets a minute to rest, or to go out for a change, because she has so much to do. And she is getting pale and thin."

"I have n't noticed it. It's because she lives in the city. Folks are never so healthy looking in cities. She never complains," said the lady.

"No, ma'am. I don't believe she would complain unless she was really sick; and I don't want her to get to that."

"I guess you don't need to worry about her till she complains," said the lady, rising to signify to Dean that the interview was ended. But Dean was not satisfied to go away without accomplishing anything. He hardly knew what he ought to say. He had no experience in dealing with such

matters, and he flushed to his forehead as he stammered, —

“I — I can’t let her stay here, unless, in some way, she can have time to rest, and go out.”

“You ’re a pretty small boy to be talking about not letting your sister stay where she chooses to stay,” said the lady, still more coldly and indifferently, advancing as she spoke and so backing Dean toward the kitchen-door.

“Dio is larger than I, but she is no older,” said Dean standing his ground as well as he could, and determined not to go till he had an understanding with Mrs. Lapham. “We are twins; and though I have no right to say what she must do, I am quite sure she will take my advice. And she must not stay much longer unless she can have things made easier for her.”

His firm attitude made Mrs. Lapham feel that it might be as he said, and Dio would leave her unless she took some pains to conciliate this young champion. So she said after a moment’s thought,—

“I suppose it ’s her afternoon out that you are aiming at. Well, I suppose I can manage that generally. I ’ll try. She may have Thursday

afternoon, if she will hurry up and get through her work."

"I should like to have her go with me to meeting Sunday evening, if you please."

"Well, if she can manage it. She plans the work to suit herself mostly, though to be sure Mr. Lapham is irregular about coming in to meals, and we do have a deal of company. But I 'll try to arrange it."

Dio's step was now heard in the kitchen, and with thanks Dean withdrew to have a little talk with her. At first she was not pleased, but rather dismayed that Dean had ventured to complain to Mrs. Lapham on her account; but when she heard that she was to have a whole afternoon of every week to herself, and Sabbath evening to go to church, she was thankful. She seemed to feel doubtful whether or not it could be accomplished, though she felt hopeful that it might be.

Mrs. Lapham soon proved that she was able to arrange matters so that Thursday afternoon and evening were at Dio's unfettered disposal. In fact, she always had been used to doing this for her help, but as Dio had not claimed it she had not thought it worth her while to suggest it.

Dio soon began to show that she was benefited by the change. Her natural liveliness returned, and she worked more rapidly and efficiently when there was a prospect of getting through in season for a walk with her brother, and a taste of the pleasure of association with other young people. It was, in fact, a gain to Mrs. Lapham as well as to her, and only the indolence and selfishness of the lady caused her to fail to realize that it would be so.

After much urging on Dean's part, and a message of invitation from that lady, Dio went one afternoon to visit Mrs. Budd. Dean was at work at this hour; and Dio, knowing it would be so, had dreaded the visit, sure that she would not know what to say to Mrs. Budd, and that it would be very embarrassing to her.

But Mrs. Budd was as kind and motherly as she could be, and Dio was at ease with her directly; and, when she had talked with her awhile, she took her over to the shop to give her the pleasure of seeing Dean at his work.

Then she introduced her to Tina, and left the two girls to talk over their experiences and trials, and cement a new friendship, while she prepared



Tina was frank and outspoken.



TO VINU  
AMERICAN

a nice little treat for the three, when Dean should come home from his work. It was a day long to be remembered with pleasure by Dio, and it was not the last spent in that pleasant home; for having found her way, and met a cordial greeting, Dio was as fond of going there as if Mrs. Budd had been her own mother and Tina an affectionate and sympathizing sister.

Tina was frank and outspoken, and she soon cured Dio of accepting Mrs. Lapham's cast-off finery in lieu of her own proper wages. Dio herself was not slow to take in the lesson of the difference in her own and Tina's appearance, and Dean soon had the pleasure of seeing her more suitably dressed.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE BLIZZARD.

THE winter went by while all I have been telling transpired, and March came in, with its abrupt changes from mildness and sunshine to cold and storm.

One Sabbath evening one of these storms kept both Dean and Dio in their homes. It was indeed one of the worst the winter had seen — a regular blizzard. Even in the city streets men lost their way, and were only saved from perishing in the intense cold by timely assistance.

Dean sat, with an open book in his hand, under the softly shaded light of the shining lamp, but his thoughts strayed away over the ten miles of prairie that separated him from his log-cabin home. He wished he could know that they were all safe and well there, through this terrible storm. Filled with fears that he could hardly account for, he more than once, or twice, walked to the windows, and lifted the curtains to look

out upon the wild tumult. Nothing could be seen but the whirling, driving snow. Even the houses across the street were invisible. Mr. Budd noticed Dean's restlessness and easily guessed the cause.

"'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain,'" he repeated impressively.

Dean turned and looked at him with a wistful, questioning gaze.

"Don't you find any comfort in that verse?" inquired Mr. Budd.

"I suppose," said Dean, "it means it is of no use to watch the storm, and worry. I can't do a thing."

"No, you can't do a thing. But is n't it a comfort to think that it is all in the Lord's hands. Take another passage with it. 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.'"

"I wish I knew pa feared Him, and was n't off somewhere at work to-day, and the little children left alone," was Dean's thought. But he said nothing. He returned to his book, un-

willing to display his uneasiness. But he could not fix his attention upon the printed page. "Except the Lord keep the house, — except the Lord keep the house," — kept running through his mind, for he could not recall the verse exactly. "I hope He will keep the little children; and Marv — poor Marv! The Lord will encamp round him to deliver him, for he certainly does fear Him. Oh, I do wish pa would n't work Sundays!"

The storm having prevented all visitors, the household of the Laphams were all in bed by eight o'clock, it being their custom under such circumstances to "cut off Sunday at both ends," by rising late, and retiring early on that day. Dio having spent the whole day in the warm kitchen, which was on the sheltered side of the house, hardly realized the violence of the storm. Yet her thoughts were often of home, and the little ones there. Weary with the day's labors she soon fell asleep, however, nor did she waken till the faint light of dawn fell upon her eyelids and notified her that it was time to get up, and begin again her weekly round of toil.

The morning of this Sabbath day had been

mild and pleasant. Felix Windom rose before it was fully light, ate a hurried breakfast, and was off to the mill before either of his children was awake. Marvel, always a late sleeper, was at length aroused by the chatter and frolic of the little girls, who were all in the trundle-bed together.

"You ought to get up and build the fire, 'cause pa is gone," called Vinnie, as soon as she found out that he was awake.

"You get up and build it, Rolfe," said Marvel, turning to his brother, who lay, wide-awake but silent, at his side.

"No, you 're the one to get up and build the fire. Dean said you must take his place while he was away, and Dean always built it," said Rolfe.

Marvel growled a little, but he soon got up, and in a short time the fire was burning briskly.

"I wonder how long a stove 'll last, after it 's all worn out," said he meditatively as he sat watching the blaze, plainly visible through many cracks in the old stove.

"I expect it 'll fall to pieces some day," said Rolfe, "and burn up the house. And then what 'll we do?"

"Build a better one," said Marvel. "Pa 's got a lot of money. Goin' to buy a team. Reckon he 'll have to buy a stove first."

"Old Mooly is calling for her breakfast," said Vinnie. "You better hurry up, and get your shoes tied, and go and feed the cows and milk; and then I 'll get up and get breakfast. I 'm hungry already."

"So am I!" from a little chorus of voices.

Marvel went out with pail in hand, and Vinnie, in whom necessity had developed an amount of energy and ability quite unexpected, soon had the beds in order, and breakfast cooking on the stove. There were potatoes now in plenty; and though it was still necessary to cook the bread on a griddle on the top of the stove, there was milk, or molasses, to eat with it, and with healthy appetites, such as these children had, no one thought of grumbling at the fare.

After breakfast Marvel brought the Bible and gave it to Vinnie, for she was now the best reader in the cabin, and she read a Psalm. It was Marvel's energy and determination that had kept up the Bible reading after Dean and Dio went away. Felix had lately fallen into the habit of

rising from the table before all were fairly done eating, and going out, leaving his children to read, or neglect it as they saw fit. Dean had laid his charges upon Marvel to see that "ma's way" was kept up, and Marvel's natural obstinacy helped to keep him faithful in this.

In one of Dean's letters home he had written that Mr. Budd's family had prayer after the reading, and also had worship Sabbath mornings, and Marvel could not be satisfied till he had persuaded Vinnie to adopt the same practice. He was not afraid or ashamed to try to pray aloud.

Those who would laugh at the prayer of a poor boy whose ability was not equal to his Christian spirit, are perhaps not a few, but are to be pitied for not rather being moved to tears by some of his petitions. He had tried hard to learn to read the Bible, and in his efforts, and in other ways, he had got some passages by heart, and these passages were interwoven in his prayers, their grand language making a strange contrast to the petitions that were prompted by his own sense of need, and put in his own words.

But Marvel's young brother and sisters were not disposed to criticise, and they respected



Marvel, more than they had ever done before, for his fearlessness and faithfulness.

There was plenty to do to get ready for the morning service. There was to be preaching in the schoolhouse that Sabbath. Vinnie worked with much energy to get things in order, and the children dressed in season. Miss Felicia came in on her way to meeting and helped a little, and so they all set off together in good time.

The Sabbath-school was to be after the service, but experienced eyes had been watching the signs of the weather. The wind, which had been southerly, suddenly veered round to the north-west, and many who had come with teams made hasty preparations and started for home the moment the service was over.

The superintendent, after conferring with one or two others, called the school to order only to say that the signs of a violent storm warned him to hasten home, and he would advise every one to do the same. There would be no school that day.

"I don't see that it looks like a storm," said Vinnie, as they came out of the schoolhouse. "My! is n't it cold, though? Marv, you take

hold of one of Mattie's hands, and I 'll take the other, and we 'll just run. Rolfe and Lottie take hold of hands and run too. I 'm glad we 've no further to go."

"It 's going to be a blizzard, I believe," said Miss Felicia as she passed them on the road. "Look at that cloud!"

Vinnie looked, but could see nothing she could call a cloud. There was only a dim white haze along the sky at the north and west. But she could feel now and then, sharp, stinging blows upon her face, as if from tiny bits of ice.

There was, indeed, a sudden and violent change in the temperature. Short as was the distance they had to go, their fingers were benumbed with cold before they reached home, and tears stood on the round, red cheeks of little Mattie.

"Is your father at home?" asked Mr. Lewis, pausing in his hurry to ask the question.

"No, he went to the saw-mill," said Marvel.

"Water and feed your cows the first thing after you get home, and be sure to shut the stable-door so the wind can't get it open, or they 'll freeze in this storm. It 's going to be a blizzard, and you may not be able to go out again before morning."

Miss Felicia heard, and turned back with one of her sudden, decisive movements, saying, —

“Father, I believe I ’ll stay with them. Mr. Windom can’t possibly get home to-night, if he ’s down to the saw-mill. I ’d rather stay than to lie awake all night and worry about them.”

“One of the boys might stay,” suggested her father.

“No, I ’ll stay. There ’s plenty cooked, ready for your dinners. You ’ll find the beans and brown bread all hot in the oven.”

Her father did not stop to parley longer. He hurried on, while Miss Felicia and the children gladly sought the shelter of the log cabin. Already a fine snow, whose particles seemed like morsels of sharply cut ice, was filling the air.

Marvel hastened to obey Mr. Lewis’ instructions, and having attended to the wants of the cows and the fowls, securely fastened them into the little stable which he and Dean had made warm with abundant coverings of hay and straw on every side but the south, where they had made a door.

“So glad we ’ve got a good warm place for ’em,” he muttered, as with chattering teeth and

benumbed limbs he hurried into the house. "It 's going to be an awful storm. Reckon pa won't try to come home," he remarked as he held his cold fingers to the fire. "Freeze old Bony in his tracks if he does."

Felix had named his horse Bonaparte, which being shortened to Bony by the children, was a name peculiarly fitting.

"I hope he won't start," said Miss Felicia, "and I don't believe he will come farther than Holt's anyway."

They had dinner, and then their good friend made the hours pass cheerfully with talk, and reading, and singing. They scarcely heeded the storm which howled around the cabin; for Dean's last task before leaving home had been to chink the logs as carefully as possible, making the cabin warmer than it had ever been before. It grew so dark that they had to light the lamp in order to see to read, and yet it was not night.

"You ought to milk the cows," said Vinnie to Marvel, at last. "It 's time, I know."

"Mr. Lewis said not to go out again to-night," said Marvel. He rose, however, and went to the window to peer out through the small panes. He could see absolutely nothing.

"I guess he 'd better let it go," said Miss Felicia. "It 's too bad to go out. I 've read that sometimes in these blizzards folks get lost in their own door-yards. They can't find their way even from the barn to the house, but stray off one side, and are lost in the snow, and freeze and die. Let the cows go, this one night."

"But the calf must have her supper," said Rolfe. "And pa will scold if Rose is n't milked. She gives a whole pailful of milk." Rose was the heifer which they had raised. She was now the mother of a fine calf a few weeks old, which they were also raising. Rose was the pride of Felix's heart, being unusually promising as a milker. Miss Felicia came to the window, and tried to look out. "I 'm afraid to have Marvel go out," she said.

After some hesitation and perplexity, she turned to Vinnie and asked, "Where 's your clothes-line?"

"We have n't only a little piece of one," said Vinnie. "It 's here," and she brought it from a nail where it hung.

"Have n't you some strong string?" demanded Miss Felicia.

Vinnie made vigorous search, and soon produced a quantity of various kinds, which Miss Felicia tied together, making a line which she judged was long enough to reach the barn.

"Now get the calf's milk ready and we 'll tie Marvel by this string so he can't get lost, and let him go out," said she.

Vinnie skimmed the milk, and warmed it, and Marvel tied his hat down over his ears. Then Miss Felicia tied one end of her string to the wooden door-latch, and gave the other into his hand, saying, "Tie it to the barn door, when you get there. Mind you don't let go of it, or break it. It is n't as strong as I wish it was. When you are ready to come in, put your hand on it and follow it. Don't untie it. Just follow it to the house."

Marvel grinned and nodded, and went away with his skimmed milk for the calf, and his pail for the new milk. They followed him to the door to let him out and watch his going; but the storm shut him in quickly, and they were glad to close the door to keep out the wind and snow.

Miss Felicia counted the minutes while she waited for his return. She could not talk or

sing; she could only worry. She knew Marvel for a blundering fellow; and she felt almost sure he would break the string, or lose hold of it, or tie it so carelessly that the wind would take it away. I think she did some praying; for, strong and wise and capable as she was, Miss Felicia knew that her power was weakness, and her wisdom foolishness, compared to that power and wisdom which come down from above, and is exercised in answer to prayer. Oh, yes, Miss Felicia prayed, and as energetically as she did other things. So now she silently but earnestly begged of her Lord to take care of Marvel.

The time seemed long. It was surely time he was through with his work. Five minutes, — ten, — still he did not come.

“He ought to be in by this time,” said she. Unable to control her uneasiness, she went to the door, opened it a crack, and called “Marvel! Marvel!” But the wind whisked the call off her lips, and drowned it in its own roaring. She could scarcely hear it herself; much less could Marvel, at even a few yards’ distance. At last there came a bang at the door and Marvel came in, his hair and eyebrows and the soft light beard

that was beginning to show itself upon his face all incrustated with snow, his eyes nearly sealed together, and his hands as stiff and benumbed as if quite frozen.

All were busy for a few minutes restoring him to some degree of comfort.

"My! my! but it 's a storm! Reckon I 'd a been lost 'thout that string. Could n't hardly feel it noways, but I kept a holt of it. Could n't see nothin'!" said he, as soon as he got breath enough to talk.

"What made you so long?" asked Miss Felicia.

"Barn all full of snow. Had to push hard as I could to get in. Shovelled out a heap. Could n't get the door shut."

"Did you get it shut at last, so the wind won't drive it open?" demanded Rolfe, who was beginning to take some care upon himself.

"Yes. Hard — tight! Wind won't get that door open," said Marvel.

Felix's attention had been so absorbed in his work, which was wholly indoors, that he noticed no indication of a storm until the first flakes of snow began to fall. Even then he did not think



it necessary to start for home immediately. But he went now and then to the door to look out, and presently came to the conclusion that, if he were to go home that night, the sooner he started the better. He made his preparations and was soon on the way.

He did not fully realize the bitter cold till he rode out upon the open prairie. Then it penetrated his insufficient clothing, and chilled him to the very bone. His poor old horse was slow and weak; and Felix soon found it best, not only to relieve and encourage him, but to warm himself by exercise, to get out and walk at his side. They made the best headway possible against the storm, till Felix began to think he must have gone fully a mile and ought to be near Mr. Holt's house. He had become convinced that it was useless to try to get farther than that in such a storm.

But all traces of the road had long since vanished; and unconsciously Felix and his horse had been veering to the northeast, instead of keeping due north as his road lay. There were no houses near in this direction.

Felix presently stopped in utter bewilderment. To look around him was impossible. He was

inclosed in an impenetrable white veil, and beside this his eyes and face were continually becoming incrustated with snow. The wind smote him, and his teeth chattered. Poor old Bony shook as with an ague.

"I 'll freeze if I stand still, and blamed if I know which way to go," said the shivering man. His horse drooped his head, and was asleep in a moment.

"That won't do! He 'll freeze if he goes to sleep, same as a man!" thought Felix, and gave him a blow to rouse him. Then he loosed him from the wagon. There was a ragged old comforter, the only carriage blanket Felix could boast. He shook it clear of snow, and threw it over the horse, and, fighting against the wind, managed to secure it under the harness, so as to give the poor beast some protection.

"The wind is northwest. I must sheer off a bit, — not face it square. But I might go by Holt's a rod east or west and never know it. I 'm bad off. That 's a fact." He thought this rather than uttered it; for his whole frame was shaking with cold, and he had no energy left to expend in words.

He went on a little way. Then his horse stopped again, and was asleep. All Felix's efforts to urge him on were vain. "He 's just freezin' in his tracks, and that 's what I 'm goin' to do if I don't look sharp," was his mental comment.

Again he tried, by usage so rough that his own heart recoiled, to rouse the horse to further effort. It was useless.

Felix drew off the comforter, and wrapped it round his own benumbed form, and leaving the horse to his fate, pushed on in what he thought might be the right direction.

The comforter was some protection. He could at least keep the snow from incrusting his face, with its help. But he was nearly despairing; for he knew he might struggle on for hours, if he could hold out so long, and never find his way to a house.

"I must have got past Holt's long and long ago; and get home through this blizzard I never can," was his mental conclusion, and for a moment he sank down on a drift with his back to the wind. But he knew better than to allow himself to sit still. He resisted the longing for

just a few minutes more of rest. He knew that to yield would be speedy death.

He began to stumble about in any direction, trying to find a place where the snow had drifted deep. He had heard of people in like desperate circumstances burrowing into the snow, and saving themselves by the protection it afforded. He found a tolerably large drift, and began to hollow out a grave in its depths, much doubting whether he should ever come out of it alive, but so benumbed was he, by this time, that he seemed to care very little whether he did or not. To get in out of the wind, and rest, was all he hoped for.

Morning came, and the storm had passed. The wind was still keenly cold, and the snow had drifted into the cabin at every possible crevice; but there was a power in the bright sunbeams to enliven and cheer all hearts and dispel thoughts of danger, and with good courage the children, under Miss Felicia's direction and with her help, began to shovel, and sweep and clear out the snow and make ready to go about their usual morning work.

"I guess pa stayed at Mr. Holt's. That 's as far as he would want to come facing the storm, I reckon," said Rolfe. "He 'll be home by and by."

Miss Felicia felt uncomfortable when she thought how easily he might have lost his way, even in going one mile. She only waited to see the cabin cleared of snow, and a good fire burning in the stove, and then hurried home, on the plea that she must get breakfast for her own folks.

As soon as the Lewis family had taken a hurried breakfast the horses were harnessed, and the men set off to open the road and find out if their neighbor was safe. They went straight to Mr. Holt's house first. As Felix had not been there they went on, thinking he might have gone to the house of his employer, which was not far from the saw-mill.

When they became convinced that he had attempted to reach home, they summoned help, and all the neighborhood turned out to make thorough search for him.

After a few hours some one came upon Felix's horse. He lay upon his side, dead, and the snow

had drifted around and over him, nearly hiding his poor bony frame from sight. Judging that Felix would be found in the immediate vicinity, the call was given that summoned all to the spot, and the search was confined to a smaller radius. Every drift was scanned and probed, and it was not long before that in which Felix lay hidden was discovered, and he was taken out more dead than alive. They carried him at once to Mr. Holt's house and all that they knew how to do was done to restore him. Hands and feet were frozen, and the little life that was left in him seemed but a spark that the lightest breath would extinguish.

Albert Lewis was sent for a doctor and also to bring home Dean and Dio. On his way he stopped to tell his sister the result of the search, that she might break the news of their father's condition to his children in the cabin.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE INVALID.

It was a sad home-coming for Dean and Dio. For the first few days both were at Mr. Holt's house with their father, whose life hung by a thread. Then Dio went home to prepare for the coming of the invalid, while Dean remained to take care of him. For Felix's one desire seemed to be to get home. He fretted and pined for home, seeming to feel that if he could once get there he would leave behind the pain and prostration that were the result of his terrible exposure. So, when the weather became mild again, he was laid on a bed in a wagon and carefully conveyed to his cabin.

His neighbors, who had faithfully ministered to him in his trouble, felt that suffering was likely to complete the work that exposure had begun, and death would soon remove the maimed and helpless father from his family. They did their best for him; but each had home cares of his own,

and after he came home he was left more to the care of his children.

It was weary work for Dean and Dio; for all their father's natural good humor and easy contentment had vanished with illness, and he bemoaned himself continually, and was as peevish and exacting as an invalid could well be.

The doctor had declared amputation of the right hand and foot necessary, from the first; but Felix could by no means be brought to consent to this, although informed that his life might be the penalty of his refusal. After much needless suffering the necessity became obvious, even to himself, and they were removed; but the delay had much lessened his chances of recovery, and the hand and foot that remained, having been badly frozen also, were the more slow in healing because of the lessened vitality of the whole system. A cough set in, slight at first, but frequent and harassing, and of increasing violence.

The poor man could not but see that if he recovered he must henceforth be a helpless burden upon his children, since the lost hand and foot were on the same side, making the use of



a crutch impossible. This knowledge caused frequent periods of severe depression. Yet he never seemed to contemplate any issue but recovery.

"I 'll get out o' this, and set up awhile to-morrer mornin'," he said each day, when his neighbors came to see him. "I 'm too tired like to-day."

Miss Felicia was more gentle and kind to him in his illness than she had ever dared to be in former days. She came daily, and brought such delicacies as were suited to his enfeebled condition, and she tried faithfully and earnestly to lead him to make some preparation for the change that must soon come to him.

But Felix was always "too tired like to-day," to talk or think about the interests of his poor soul; and he persistently refused to see, what to everyone else was plain, that day by day he was growing weaker. He still talked about getting well.

Dean was full of concern about his father. He prayed for him constantly; but Felix would listen to none of Dean's appeals, or even hear him read from the Bible. He said it tired him, and he

would attend to these things when he got better. "No use to try to think of anything when a body lies bedfast," he said. "I 've bothered my brains more 'n a little to contrive a crutch that I could walk with, but I jest can't make out nothin'. Must wait till I get well."

One afternoon the minister, who now came once a month to preach in the schoolhouse, made him a visit, and urged upon him the necessity of immediate repentance and casting himself upon the mercy of the Saviour of sinners, telling him plainly that he had not long to live.

"Wall, Preacher," said Felix, "I 'll tell ye how 't is. I never felt like I wanted to be religious, — that is to say, to go in deep. I have n't never been no great of a sinner, though I don't claim I 've been perfect by no means. But I 've been a poor man with a living to get, and I could n't let religion, nor nothin' else, hender me from gettin' ahead. But I was always afeard of goin' to that other place the Bible tells about, and I meant to do somethin' in time. I 'm mighty bad to-day, that 's a fact, but it 's my bad day. Every other day I 'm a leetle better. To-morrer 'll be my good day, and to-morrer" — A fit of

coughing interrupted the expression of his good intentions, and left him so prostrated that it was impossible to talk with him any more.

That night he died. The morrow never came for Felix.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A TEAM.

MR. BUDD had requested Dean to write him news of his father's condition, and how things were likely to turn as to his coming back to work for him. The six months for which he had engaged himself were nearly ended when he was called home. Dean had written; and he wrote again, after his father's death, to say that it seemed to him that he ought to remain at home. This letter brought Mr. Budd out to Billow Prairie to see him.

He offered such good terms for a fresh engagement, which he wished to make for a year, that Dean was surprised.

"I wish I could accept your terms, Mr. Budd. There is nothing I should like better than to come back to you," he replied. "But Dio and I are bound to stay here and take care of the children. Our mother left them to us, and there's nobody else. Marvel is good to help, but

he can't plan work, and he 's lame. Rolfe has an old head on his shoulders, but he 's only a little boy. You see how it is, sir; I can't go away from the children."

"Well, Dean, I don't see as I ought to urge you. But I am sorry to lose you, and I could make it to your advantage to come. It seems a little hard that your prospects in life must be sacrificed. You are meant for a mechanic. You don't like farming?"

"Not as well as I wish I did, as I 've got it to do. But I 'm going to take hold of it and do my best," said Dean bravely.

"And you 'll have to work at a disadvantage," continued Mr. Budd. "Your father lost his horse. You have no team, then, have you?"

"No, sir. But my father had been saving up money to buy one, and we 've a little over fifty dollars left now. The doctor was so kind he would not be paid at present. He said any time when we had got ahead enough to pay it easily, he would be glad of it, but not till then."

"Fifty dollars won't buy a team," remarked Mr. Budd.

"I thought perhaps I could buy a horse of some

kind," said Dean. "We must make one do, now."

"I have a pair of horses that I 've been thinking of selling," said Mr. Budd. "My bay mare is a little tender-footed, and she 'll never get over it while I have to use her constantly on the city streets. Out here on a farm she would be all right. She 's a good creature, worth a hundred and twenty-five dollars if her feet were sound. You may have her for fifty; and if ever you 're dissatisfied with your bargain, I 'll take her again, and give you your money."

"You can't mean Nell! Why, Mr. Budd! She 's worth a good deal more than fifty dollars. Dissatisfied! I guess not! I know Nell too well! I shall be so pleased to have her, and I thank you so much, Mr. Budd!"

"Then there 's Dick. He 's getting a trifle old, but he 's sound and strong. I ought to have a better horse for my work, but Dick would be useful to you for some years. You may have Dick for fifty, and I 've an old set of harnesses that I 'll throw in; not very valuable, but it 'll serve you till you can get new."

"Mr. Budd, you 're very generous to me," said Dean. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Well, I owe you something, Dean. You were worth more to me those six months than I paid you; but I thought it best to keep to the bargain, and I meant to make it up to you in some way. Nell's worth seventy-five of anybody's money, and Dick nearly as much. You can pay me the fifty, and give me your note for fifty more, without interest. It is n't good in law, because you're a minor, but I know I can trust you to pay. It's best to have the note to show what the bargain is."

With trembling fingers Dean set about writing the note. It seemed too good to be true. With a suitable team it would not be half the sacrifice to leave the work he preferred, and go to farming. Indeed, his enthusiasm began to rise at once at the thought of owning such a pair of horses as Nell and Dick.

"I'll pay it just as soon as I can," he said, as he handed the note to Mr. Budd.

"I'm sorry to lose you, on Harry's account as well as on my own," said Mr. Budd, as he folded the note, and put it in his pocket-book. "But the boy has got a good start now, in the right direction. If you ever leave the farm for other

work, come to me, and I 'll have a place ready for you. When 'll you come up and get your team? Suppose you ride up with me this afternoon, and stay till to-morrow, or longer if you can. Mrs. Budd would be glad to see you, and Harry will be delighted."

"Thank you, Mr. Budd. I will go. I 'll be ready in a few minutes," said Dean.

He retired behind the curtain to dress for the expedition, and Mr. Budd occupied the time by making the acquaintance of the younger children, and talking with Dio. Marvel was away working for Mr. Lewis, in payment for certain work he had done during the illness of his father. Rolfe was with him. Dean had remained at home that day to make the garden.

"Are you contented here?" Mr. Budd asked Dio. "Do you like the country as well as the city?"

"Better," said Dio. "I like to be at home, and I like to be with Dean. Then I always felt crowded and shut in, in the city. I enjoy the freedom of the open country, and the greenness and freshness of everything. But I liked the meetings there, and some other things that we can't have here."



"How is it about your farm? I think Dean told me once that his father had not secured his title."

"Father was always intending to do something about it, but he never did. It required some money, and there are so many uses for money on a new farm, that he always thought he wanted it more for something else."

"He had entered upon the land, I suppose."

"Why, no, sir, I believe he had done nothing. A man named Harris entered upon it, and built this cabin. He was a roving sort of a fellow, and soon left it to go farther west. Then John Faxon, an old neighbor of ours, who had been here a year or two, wrote to father about it, and we moved right down here."

Dean now came out from his retirement, having heard through the curtain all that had been said.

"Mr. Budd," said he, "I've often felt troubled because that business has not been attended to. Father thought it was safe so long as we live here, whether we have a title or not. Do you think so?"

"I do not," said Mr. Budd emphatically. "I am very sure you are running a great risk of

losing it, especially now that the country is filling up so fast."

"Then if you would add one more favor to the many you have shown me, and help or advise me in the matter, I should be very thankful."

"I will. We will attend to it at once," said his friend.

They rode away, and after watching them out of sight, Dio and her sisters returned to their work in the garden — work in which Dio took far more pleasure than she had ever done in Mrs. Lapham's kitchen.

They had a good variety of seeds to sow, for Dio had bought some with her own money. Since she had begun to be a reader she found there was much in the world worth having, of which she had never dreamed; and a few agricultural papers had aroused her enthusiasm on the subject of sweet-corn, early pease, spinach, etc., till she was full of eager ambition about the garden, and spent upon it every moment she could spare from her other duties.

On their arrival in the city, Mr. Budd and Dean went at once to attend to the important business of securing the title to the farm. When

all had been done that was proper and necessary in the matter, Dean, with lightened heart, went to enjoy his visit. He had still some hours to spend with his friends, as it was not four o'clock when he surprised Mrs. Budd by presenting himself before her.

She was greatly pleased to see him, and took it for granted that he had come to stay, and appeared quite disappointed when Dean told her he could only stay one night. Harry came in almost immediately, and the two boys went to take a look at Dean's new property.

"I do believe Nell remembers me," said Dean as the gentle creature turned and greeted him with a soft neighing. "Nell, do you know you are mine!—mine! Oh, Harry, I am so pleased! I do think you have the very best father that ever was."

"I think so too," replied Harry. Yet in his secret heart he thought it strange that Dean, having just lost his father, could make such a speech. But Dean could not pretend what he did not feel. He had felt very sorry for his father, and had shed some natural tears at his death; but he could not help knowing that he was

not such a father as Harry had, nor could he force himself to imagine great virtues where none had existed, now that he was gone. He had intended no comparison, but simply spoke as he thought and felt.

The evening was one of unmixed pleasure, — at least the only alloy was that Dean must leave for home quite early in the morning, as the spring work was urgent.

Marvel and Rolfe were as much pleased, when they came home, to hear of the new acquisition, as the rest had been. It was quite a sacrifice for them to go away to their work again in the morning, before Dean could get home, for they were so eager to see the horses. But they owed Mr. Lewis the work. He had been most friendly in helping them at a time when it was impossible, on account of the loss of their horse, and their father's illness, for them to accomplish much. And one of Marvel's excellent points was an absolute faithfulness in the performance of a promise. He had promised Mr. Lewis, and he was off at the earliest possible moment after breakfast. Rolfe went with him, for he could be useful too.

So when Dean came in sight, riding Nell and

leading Dick, there were only the girls to welcome him, but they had been on the watch for hours, — long before he could possibly be expected, — and came out a good distance to meet him, and there was great and gleeful excitement, in which even little Mattie had a share.

“Lift her up, Dio, and she shall have a ride home on our Nell,” said Dean joyfully. “I ’d take you too, if I could,” he added, seeing Lottie looking wistfully. “I can’t manage but one now.”

Dio lifted Mattie, and her black eyes shone with pleasure as she rode home with Dean’s arm around her.

After an hour’s rest Dean harnessed his horses to the plow, and went out to the field, so happy, and thankful, that he quite forgot that this was not the work that, of all others, he preferred.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## NEW PLANS.

"WE must have a new house," said Dio, one day in July when the wheat was fast ripening. "This is n't decent."

"We must pay our debts," said Dean.

"Of course," responded Dio. "Do you suppose there will be enough?" She meant of the money the wheat would bring.

"I hope so," said Dean. "It's a good crop. Better than last year."

"And not any more than enough?"

"Why," said Dean. "There are the other expenses; clothes, and shoes, and groceries, and"—

"I'll trust the poultry and eggs to buy the groceries, now that we've so many," said Dio quickly, interrupting him.

"Yes," said Dean. "Perhaps they will; but,"—he hesitated, for it was hard to destroy the hopes of his sister. He did n't wonder she felt cramped in the little log cabin, after the ample

rooms of Mrs. Lapham's house. And in very truth it was n't a decent habitation for this large family of growing boys and girls. But the necessity was imperative, so he went on: "There are tools I must buy, Dio. Our little plow was made for a single horse. We can't depend upon it for another year. And we need a harrow. We can't borrow such things. We waste time going after them and returning them; and it 's no end of inconvenience. You see, Twinnie, tools to work with must come first. And we need more than we shall be able to get this year."

"I know it, Dean. But we just can't live this way two years longer. We must have at least another room. With one more room, and a cellar under it, I could make butter to sell. But what can I do in this one room? There 's no place to set the milk."

Dean was silent, looking wistfully and sorrowfully in his sister's face.

"How much would it cost?" demanded Dio. "Just the cheapest and plainest kind of a room?"

"Well, if Marv and I do all the work, and we

could at odd times, it might not cost more than fifty dollars."

"Three in fifty is, — let me see! — about seventeen weeks."

"What are you reckoning?" said Dean, laughing. "Three in fifty is seventeen weeks!"

"I 'm reckoning how long I should have to work for Mrs. Lapham to get fifty dollars. I might go back for awhile, I suppose. You and Vinnie could get along."

"Mrs. Lapham has got somebody else by this time," said Dean.

"Well, there are other places, plenty of them. Perhaps I could get more than three dollars. My clothes would cost some more than they would at home, so I reckon I should have to stay half a year."

"And I could earn the same money in half the time. I think I 'd better go, and let you stay here," said Dean, "if Mr. Budd would take me for so short a time. Maybe he would n't."

"If only we could both go," sighed Dio. "I should be so lonesome without you."

"And I should be lonesome too. But I would write to you every week, and you would write to



me, and the time would pass, and we should have our new room to pay."

The plan was thought over, and talked over, and prayed over, till the wheat was harvested, and threshed, and sold, and then, one day in August, with the money in his hands to pay the doctor's bill and the note to Mr. Budd, Dean went up to the city. Dio went with him to make her fall purchases, and they took Lottie because it was "her turn" to have an outing.

"We ought to have a Society of Christian Endeavor on Billow Prairie," said Dio, as they rode along. It was not the first time this had been said. But it had not yet been acted upon. "And if you go away we cannot, for a long time at least."

They were still pondering the question of Dean's going back to Mr. Budd. In fact, they had quite concluded that he must go, if Mr. Budd should want him.

"If I don't go till the corn is harvested, and I don't see how I can, we could begin one right away," Dean replied. "If it was well started it would go on. The Lewis boys will take hold of it in earnest, I know."

"Yes," said Dio. "Well, I suppose it will be settled to-day whether you are to go, or not. I don't know whether I shall be gladdest to have a new room to the house, or to keep you at home."

"Then you can't fail to be glad whichever way it is," said Dean. "I do think we must have the room. But, anyway, we 'll have a new window in the cabin. We might have had that before now. Two windows will make it much pleasanter, and it will cost but a trifle."

"Another thing that we almost must have is a stove," said Dio. "I 'm really afraid the one we 've used so long, — always I guess," with a little laugh, "will fall to pieces some day, and set the cabin on fire. And we ought to get some fruit-trees."

"Yes," said Dean. "The trees are very important. If they were once set out they would be all the time growing."

"Oh, dear!" said Dio. "How many things we do need! I 've laid awake nights thinking about it."

Dean looked round into his sister's healthy, happy face, and laughed a little incredulously.

"I guess you don't lie awake nights very often, or very long," said he.

"But I truly do," asserted Dio. "It makes me feel sick when I see the fruit the Lewises and the Boyds have set out, and we have n't a thing but the peach-trees I planted. Miss Felicia says I may bud them from those they bought, and she will show me how, so I can do it myself. But I do want apple and pear and cherry trees. Let's go without everything else, and buy some."

"Well, — everything we can," said Dean.

When Dean came to talk with Mr. Budd he found himself obliged to modify his plans. Mr. Budd did not wish to hire him for less than six months, and would like to have him come in September. Dean conferred with Dio. It was twice as long a time as they had contemplated.

"He offers me seven dollars a week and board," said Dean. "We could have the new stove, and the trees, and the room too, if I stayed six months. A good large room too, with two full-sized windows."

Dio's courage rose in view of such inducements.

"I reckon Marvel and Rolfe could manage the

work. I can help them if it is necessary," said she thoughtfully. "I think it is best for you to go. But we shall have no Christian Endeavor Society."

"Yes, we will," said Dean. "We 'll start one next Sunday. I can call and get all the material I want for a beginning, as we go home. Al Lewis will take hold of it, if I put the idea into his head."

"It won't be half as pleasant without you," sighed Dio.

"It will be pleasant, and useful too, I hope," said Dean. "And you shall not wait long for your new stove, Dio. The very first money I get shall buy it. It is too bad for you to get along with that old thing. So cheer up, and let 's enjoy what time we have together. The six months will soon pass."

"I can make good bread, such as I learned to make at Mrs. Lapham's, if we have a stove," said Dio brightening up.

She was soon talking cheerfully of all their hopes and plans. And if a shade of sadness did now and then cross her sky, she did not let it be visible to her brother's eyes.

Dean took the first opportunity to see Albert and John Lewis, and describe to them the new society, which had but just got into good working order in Elm City before he came away. They seized upon the idea at once, and were as enthusiastic as Dean had hoped. They promised to see the Boyds, and others, and talk it up before the Sabbath.

Dean had procured a copy of the Constitution and By-laws; and this they all studied diligently in the evenings, sometimes at one and sometimes at the other of the two homes.

Miss Felicia was as deeply interested in the new plans as any one, but she would take no leading part. "I will be an Honorary Member," said she; "that's the place for me. The younger ones must be the Active Members." And to this idea she held fast, notwithstanding the urgency of Dean and Dio, who would gladly have made her prominent.

The first meeting was appointed for Sabbath afternoon, at four o'clock. All the young people were there, ready to take part in any movement that promised to increase their social opportunities. There were not many among them who

could be counted upon as active members. They did not attempt a regular organization at the first meeting. The time was spent in explaining the objects and methods of the new society, in circulating the pledges, and talking over the possibilities in their own neighborhood.

It was natural that Dean Windom should take the lead in this movement because he was already an Active Member of the Society. Before circulating the pledge cards he read the pledge aloud, that all might see exactly what was required, and be prepared intelligently to sign or refuse to sign. Therefore some declined to take the cards.

"I shall have to be an Associate," said Marion Boyd, a pretty, frivolous girl. "That 's too serious for me."

Her brothers, Maxwell and Horace, took the cards offered them, exchanging jocular winks and nudges, as if they were disposed to turn the whole matter to ridicule. Others followed their example, or Marion's. A few took them with the serious purpose of giving thoughtful consideration to the matter.

If Dio had been asked, at any time previous to her stay in Elm City, whether or not she was a

Christian, she would probably have been at a loss what answer to make. Little by little, she had been led by her brother and Miss Felicia into the habits of a Christian; and she had come, she knew not how, into the feelings of a Christian. She prayed with sincerity and earnestness. She tried to do right in the fear of God. She trusted her sins were forgiven because of the promise "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," and feeling seriously that she was a sinner, she had confessed it, and asked pardon for the past, and help for the future. And so, when in Elm City the pledge had been offered her, she had read it over thoughtfully once or twice, and then said, "Why, yes! I can sign that. It's exactly what I want to do."

Marvel was pleased to have a card offered to him, and quite eager to become a member of the new society. After they got home Dean carefully explained to him again all the good he hoped it might do, and read and re-read the words on the card, to be sure he fully understood and appreciated the importance of his act in signing his name to such solemn promises. Then, after much practice at writing his name, Marvel

scrawled it, in his uncouth, imperfect fashion, at the bottom of the card.

Carrie Williams surprised and pleased Dio by bringing back her card signed. She was as shy and silent in company as ever, though fearless enough when galloping, without saddle or bridle, on one of her father's horses, over the prairie. She whispered, as she put the card into Dio's hand, "I don't know as I can take a part in the meetings. Don't seem as if I could! I'll try, though." She fulfilled her promise faithfully by the weekly recitation of a verse of Scripture, but in so low a tone that no one beyond her immediate vicinity could possibly hear what she said. It was some time before she advanced beyond this.

Horace Boyd returned his, unsigned, with the brief, frank answer, "Too religious." Max neither signed nor returned his. "I lost it," was his excuse. But these had had no religious training in the home, and great dearth of influence or instruction elsewhere. They continued to come to the meetings, but evidently only for the social opportunities they afforded.

At the second meeting Albert Lewis was



chosen President. He was quiet, and retiring, and would gladly have yielded the first place to Dio, who was fearless and energetic. But Dio would only consent to take the second place. There were so few active members that none were left without some office. Dean accepted that of corresponding secretary, which, in his case, was to mean frequent letters to the Billow Prairie Society during his absence, telling anything of interest in the meetings he should attend in Elm City, and giving them any hints he could gather for their advantage. John Lewis and Dio were on the Lookout Committee. Seven active members were all they could count.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## IMPROVEMENTS.

"I DON'T know whom to look out for, I'm sure," said Dio one evening, as she with her little sisters and the Lewis boys were walking homeward together. "Nobody can do anything with those Boyds. To think of their asking if we could n't have a little dance after the Society!"

"I guess there was a little sly mischief about that! They wanted to shock you. They are no fools," said Albert.

"But they are so coarse and rough! I asked Horace if he would n't help us by just learning a Bible verse to repeat in the meetings, and the only answer I got was one of his big horse laughs."

"I think," said Albert, "the best way is to let them alone for awhile. They don't really know anything about religion. They think it is only good to have when one is old or dying. You and I know that it's good to live by: a comfort

and blessing and help all the way; but they 've got that to learn. I 've heard, or read, that to speak to people on the subject of religion effectually, one ought to have done a deal of praying for them first. Let 's try that, and just be friendly with them, and try to have them come regularly to the meetings. Marion is beginning to be a help about the singing. I hope they will work in after awhile."

"Yes, Marion can sing; and once I heard the boys singing a foolish negro melody, as they were riding past our house, just at evening. They have grand voices."

"You 'll hear them singing something better next time perhaps," said Albert hopefully.

About the first of November there was a new acquisition to the neighborhood, and to the new society. Mr. Holt's only daughter, whose home had been in Ohio, died, leaving one child, a girl of fifteen. Her father being of a restless, changeable disposition, and unsettled by the death of his wife, wished to go and seek his fortune in the Far West, and sent his daughter to live with her grandparents.

Mr. and Mrs. Holt were delighted to receive

the little Silence into their home. She was a gentle girl, pale and small for her age, but very self-possessed and womanly. She had been her mother's dependence and almost her sole companion through the long period of her decline, and her character had thus been developed rapidly, and somewhat at the expense of her physical nature.

Silence Parker soon showed that she was a Christian, neither afraid nor ashamed to be known as such. Dio's invitation to join the Society was promptly accepted. She was the seventh active member, and the term proved no misnomer in her case.

Dio was soon on terms of friendship with Silence. They were not much alike, but they found that they were congenial. Dio was a good talker; Silence was a good listener. Dio was impulsive and sometimes rash; Silence was conservative. Dio admired the fine tact, the womanly ways, the quick intuitions in matters of dress that made Silence look like a picture whether she was in her blue checked gingham spatting the butter in her grandmother's kitchen, or cantering in her dark habit on her pretty gray

pony up the slope to the schoolhouse to take her part in the meetings.

Silence's pony was a necessity. It was a good deal to ask of her grandfather, at his age, to drive the four miles a second time on the Sabbath for her sake; and she had written to her father, who was very indulgent, and always seemed to have plenty of money, that she needed a pony, and the money was forth-coming. Bonnibel was as gentle and docile as a creature could well be, and Silence's grandparents soon came to the conclusion that no harm was likely to come to their pet in her rides. The meetings were always held at an early hour, so that all could get home before dark. Inspired by the example of Carrie Williams and Silence Parker, Dio began to practice riding on Nell's back, and soon was able to return her friends' visits without walking the distance, or calling upon Marvel to harness the horses and take her.

One incident that occurred about a month after Dean left home has not been mentioned.

Max Boyd drove up in front of the Windom cabin late one afternoon, and jumping down from the wagon came to the door, which stood open,

and showed his broad good-natured face covered with smiles.

"I 've brought ye a present, Dio," he said. "Dean sent it, and I promised to set it up fur ye."

"Oh! my new stove!" exclaimed Dio, glancing into the wagon, and seeing what freight it contained. "I 'm so glad! I thank you ever so much for bringing it, Max."

"No consequence about thanks. I was up to the city, and Dean was a watchin' a chance fur to send it to ye. Reckon yer want that old un set out first, about four miles away."

"Yes, and there 's a fire in it," said Dio. "I was just going to get supper."

"Then I 'll have to wait a spell, fur I 'm bound to set up that stove fur ye."

The sight of the new stove inspired Dio with a desire to surprise her brothers and sisters with a supper to which they had long been strangers. She would make biscuits — such biscuits as she used to make at Mrs. Lapham's. There was yet time.

"We 'll put the fire out," said she, bringing the water-pail. "We 'll soon have the old thing

cool enough to move;" and she took off the covers, and began to sprinkle water upon the coals.

"Don't keer a straw if ye crack it, do ye?" said Max with a big laugh.

"No," said Dio merrily. "It may crack all to pieces now if it wants to."

Max came and stood beside her, and they sprinkled with liberal hands. The gas and smoke rose in their faces suffocatingly; but they only laughed and persisted, and soon the fire was out. Then, with big cloths to protect their hands, they carried the old stove out behind the house and left it there; and the new one, complete in every part, and shining with blackness, was set up in its place.

"Kittles and pans a plenty come with it!" said Max exultantly, coming in laden with a goodly number of articles that he knew Dio would be delighted to have.

Max enjoyed the situation extremely. He was jocular and helpful; bringing a fresh pail of water from the well to fill the shining new tea-kettle, and driving nails on which to hang the various utensils for which there was no place

ready. When there was nothing more that he could do, he still lingered to watch the fire roaring up the chimney, till the confidence developed by a common interest, and the consciousness of being useful suddenly deserted him, and, seized with returning awkwardness and bashfulness, he took a hurried departure.

From that time, however, Maxwell was on a little easier terms with Dio. He had something to talk about at least; and every time they met for weeks he inquired how that stove worked, and declared that the gas he got into his lungs that day choked him a bit yet, his only way of saying that the pleasure of helping about the new stove remained with him still. And one Sunday evening, not long after, Max astonished everybody by repeating, with some blushing and stammering, his first Bible verse, "just to help the meetin' along," as he said apologetically afterwards.

Marion too began to show interest enough to learn a verse occasionally to recite. And Albert Lewis' hopes were fulfilled, for the Boyds were heard to sing something better than the rude songs to which they had been accustomed. Often, as they rode home from their work in the



twilight, they might be heard afar, roaring "In the sweet by and by," with astounding vehemence. When Dio spoke of this to Albert one day, deprecating such profanation of the hymns she loved, he said laughingly,—

"It's all in the way of education, Dio. They are doing as well as they know. I do think they are improving a little. Let us not mind how they manage to get up, if only they do rise a little."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE LOOK-OUT COMMITTEE.

"I 'VE a new member for our Society," said Silence Parker to Dio, one evening. "At least, I think she would sign if you would encourage her a little. It 's your sister Vinnie."

"Vinnie!" said Dio surprised. "Why, I never thought of Vinnie as old enough."

"Of course she is old enough. She 's only been waiting to be asked. She understands every word of that pledge as well as you or I, and she says she truly means to keep it. What 's to hinder her being a member?"

"I 'm ashamed! I ought to have had Vinnie in before," said Dio humbly. "To think that I 'm on the Look-out Committee, and yet you had to look out for my own sister!"

"And there 's Rolfe," said Silence. "He 's old enough, and knows enough, but I can't make out whether or not he cares enough. Rolfe is a very silent boy, and I can't get acquainted with him."

"I don't know about Rolfe, either," said Dio, "but I'll try to know. I won't leave that for somebody else to see to."

Vinnie was elected to membership, without a dissenting vote, and proved herself a very faithful little Endeavorer. Dean, who felt, as Dio did, that he had been somewhat neglectful of this young sister, wrote her a letter, all to herself, to tell her how glad he was. He wrote one to Rolfe too; but Rolfe, though evidently proud of his letter, told no one what was in it.

Dio could not win a word from Rolfe, good or bad, concerning his own feelings. He listened to all she said, and sometimes he would twinkle his bright black eyes, and seem all ready to speak, and then swallow it down, and baffle and disappoint his sister. He was always ready to go to the meetings. He liked to sing, and he often repeated a verse — generally an odd sort of verse that nobody but he would have thought of learning. Sometimes Dio objected to his verses, and doubted if they were to be found in the Bible; but he would turn over the leaves and find them, and point them out to her in silent triumph.

There were three children, between seven and

twelve years old, in a tiny house built up half-way to the eaves with turf, finished off with slabs, and thatched curiously with prairie grass. This house was about a mile and a half west from the home of the Windoms. The inmates were the latest comers to Billow Prairie, and straight from the old country. Their name was Gerhardt. The children had learned a little English at school, but the parents could converse only in German. Dio determined to look out for these in season. They already attended the Sabbath-School. She would get them to attend the meetings of the Christian Endeavor as well. They would then be in training for membership sometime.

It was not hard to win them. German children are just like any others in their fondness for going where they will find company of their own age. Kuna, Pauline, and Gottlieb all began to come every Sunday evening, and quickly developed an ability to sing the hymns they heard there.

"It 's the first step, and all in the way of education," thought Dio, as she watched their plump, stolid faces. "Now, whom else can I look

out for?" She thought there was no one at present. Farther west, fully two miles away, lived the Bradfords, a very young couple, who were rejoicing over their first baby, a wee girlie of less than three months. Dio did not think of these parents as eligible. They were married people. They had a child, and they seemed by that removed into an older class. Yet the young mother was scarcely older than Dio, and most lonely, and homesick, too, in her new and strange surroundings, till that wonderful baby came to solace her.

They brought it to the Sabbath service sometimes. Dio's desire to fondle the baby brought her to the mother's side, and they were soon acquainted. Mrs. Bradford was a gentle, appealing little woman.

"May n't I come to your Christian Endeavor meetings?" said she. "I know they are for young folks, but I'm not very old, if I am married. I want to come."

Dio almost started with surprise and dismay. "I think I'm the most stupid Look-out Committee that ever was!" said she. "Why have n't I asked you? Yes, indeed, you may come, and everybody

there will be glad to see you." And then, scarcely giving Mrs. Bradford time to express her thanks, Dio went over to John Lewis.

"John, have you asked Mr. Bradford to come to our meetings? If not, do it right away. *She* just asked me if she might come, but I want them to have a spontaneous invitation. Do it now, before he gets outdoors."

She watched him till she saw him speaking to Mr. Bradford, and then turned to speak to John Faxon and his wife, to whom a little one had lately come.

Miss Felicia did not teach school this year. She had sprained her ankle badly in the summer, and it continued to give her serious trouble. It was all she could do to accomplish her necessary housework. The teacher was a young man, lately from the East, a stranger, but good and capable. Silence Parker, Carrie Williams, and Marion Boyd went to school, but Dio did not. This was partly on Miss Felicia's account. Dio was determined, now that she had an opportunity, to repay to her good friend some of the care and kindness she had bestowed on her and her family. She rarely missed going over every

day, if only for a few minutes, and could give her many a lift that was now most acceptable.

It would have been a dull winter for Miss Felicia if it had not been for Dean and Dio. Dean did his full share. He wrote every week to Dio, and often inclosed a short letter or sent a message to Miss Felicia. Sometimes he only said, "You can read this to Miss Felicia, and give her my love"; which did his kind friend almost as much good as if it had been addressed to herself; for it showed that Dean thought of her and cared for her in her trouble.

He knew Miss Felicia loved study and lamented that her early opportunities for education had been so meager. He learned about the Chautauqua course, and immediately it came to his mind that this would be exactly the thing for her, at this very time; and he unselfishly set aside his desire to pursue it with Dio as soon as he should get home, and proposed to purchase the books and send them on, that she, with Miss Felicia, might begin the studies at once.

The plan was received with enthusiasm, as he had expected, and the tedium of Miss Felicia's confinement was greatly relieved. She saw in it

a fulfillment of years of longing and deferred hope, and seized the opportunity with such zeal, and worked with such faithfulness, that she would have left her young companion far behind, only that Dio was determined not to be left, and by diligent study managed to keep up with her.

When Albert found out what was going on, he was eager to study also. Miss Felicia and Dio did all their work in the daytime, so the books were at his disposal in the evenings when he had most leisure. So they pursued their studies independently; but there were stormy days when Albert was at leisure, and then he would come with his own gay young team, just broken to harness, and, having taken the children to school, he would carry Dio off to spend the day at his father's, and they would have a rare treat with their reading and their questions. They came to call these days their examination days.

Marvel generally came over to dinner, and sat awhile afterward listening or trying to listen to the reading; but it was much too deep for the poor lad and he soon dropped off into a series of little naps, waking refreshed, and going home with a comfortable conviction that he had had his



share of the intellectual treat that the rest found so delightful.

There were many books in the course that our three students looked into at first with doubt and hesitation, fearing to find them dull and utterly beyond their comprehension; but, as they went on, they found increasing pleasure in increasing knowledge, and the very books they had feared to undertake opened up to them a new world, and awoke broader and higher interests.

John Lewis and Horace Boyd went to school during the winter months. Some rumors of the Chautauqua Circle came to their ears, and were talked over at school and at home. Max Boyd, who neither went to school nor had anything to solace his leisure hours at home, began to feel injured because he was not invited into the circle of students. He absented himself from the Society meetings, till Dio, having sent word to him with no result, went in her capacity of Look-out-Committee to look him up. That was exactly what Max had waited for, and expected.

When she had passed the gantlet of the three big savage looking dogs, and got safely into the kitchen, she asked,—

"Why don't you come to the Society meetings any more, Max? We 've all missed you, and wondered why you stayed away so." -

Max tried to look glum, but his broad face could not altogether hide the gratification he felt at his absence being noticed.

"Don't yer think I 've always acted the part of a friend to ye, Dio?" he asked in return to her question.

"Indeed I do, Max! I have n't forgotten how you set up my new stove for me; nor how you helped set out the little trees that Dean sent home. Of course you 've been friendly."

Max's face broadened into a genial smile. He could n't help it at these allusions. It was always a pleasure to him to help Dio, and her gratification when the little fruit-trees came home had been so pleasant to see that he could not be content till he had helped to set out every one. But he drew his face down again immediately, for he had a point to gain.

"S'pos'n I found a good thing and did n't let on to nobody, nor go halves with nobody, what 'd ye think of me, Dio?"

"Why, if it was something that could be

shared just as well as not, I 'd think you 'd better share it with your friends," said Dio.

"Well, here you air! You, and Al Lewis, and Miss Fli'cia have been and got up a study class, or somethin' or nother, and they say you 're havin' tip-top times, and don't invite nobody to it but your three selves."

"Why, Max!" said Dio, restraining an inclination to laugh, "I must tell you how it was. Miss Felicia has been very good to us, while father was sick, and other times, so when Dean heard how she is laid up with her lame ankle, he was sorry for her, and sent us up a set of books to read and study together, because you know I can't go to school."

"No more can't I!" put in Max.

"And we liked it so much," continued Dio, not heeding the interruption, "that Albert thought he 'd like it too, and he began to study evenings to keep up with us. That 's all the class there is about it. I would have told you before so you could get the books and study with us, if I 'd thought you would like it."

"Course I 'd like it!" interjected Max, still a little gruffly.

"You 've only to get the books and study too, if you wish to. It 's all free, — to everybody. I 'll give you a list of the books and the prices."

"But I can't come to the meetin's, I suppose," said Max, still unsatisfied.

"Why, of course we want you to! Just as you always have," said Dio in some surprise. "That 's exactly what I came to see you about. You was n't there last Sunday, nor the Sunday before; — three Sundays we 've missed you."

She stopped, for the frown on Max's face was real now. He partly turned, as if to leave the room.

"I see how 't is!" he said. "You don't want me only to the Sunday meetin's, and I 'm blest if I ever show my head in them agin."

"Why, Max!" said Dio, greatly perplexed at her neighbor's behavior. "I don't see what you mean."

"Reckon there 's none so blind as them that won't see," growled Max.

Dio was in difficulties. She sat a moment in deep thought. Max's mother sat in the corner by the fire, smoking a pipe. She had seemed wholly uninterested, and winked and blinked at

the young people with an air of sleepy unconcern which left them quite careless of her presence. But she was not so dull as she pretended. She perceived that Dio's perplexity was real. So removing her pipe she spoke.

"P'rhaps you don't have no meetin's only Sunday meetin's. P'rhaps you don't meet of a week day evenin's to felisticate over your new studyin' books, nor nothin'."

"No, we don't!" said Dio honestly. "Of course I go over nearly every day to help Miss Felicia all I can, and we study together. Albert does his studying evenings. I never go over in the evenings. When there is a stormy day he comes to fetch me, and then of course as he can't work outdoors, we all study together. That 's all there is about it."

Dio was a little flushed and annoyed at having to make this explanation. She felt as if they had no right to search into her affairs in this way. But she did want to win Max back to the meetings, and underneath her ruffled feelings an undercurrent of thought kept suggesting something about not being able to "bear with the worm till the wings should grow." Would the wings ever grow?

There was a moment of silence, and then Dio went on, "Dean will be at home pretty soon, and then we might have a class, or a Circle I believe they call them. He would like it, I know. But of course I can't invite you to Mr. Lewis'. That 's Albert's business. I don't think he, or Miss Felicia, would have the least objection to your coming, though. The more the merrier. I 'll speak to Albert about it."

"Well, I 'm obleeged to ye. I heerd things as if you was havin' meetin's, and I thought if I was n't fine enough to come to 'em, I was n't fine enough to come to the S'ciety meetin's. And that 's the long and short of it. I 'll be there next Sunday, sure and certin," said Max, a little ashamed of his jealousy, which he began to see was without foundation.

He followed her outdoors, and walked a little way at her side. He was silent and awkward. He felt as if he ought to make an apology to her, and he did not know how.

He struggled within himself, as he walked. His face worked strangely, when Dio looked into it, wondering. What could he be thinking of?

"Ther 's a big diff'runce, somehow!" he burst

out at last. "We 'uns ain't like you 'uns! What makes it, Dio?"

"We 'uns used to be more like you 'uns," said Dio musingly, and relapsing into a trick of speech that Miss Felicia had broken her of using years ago.

"I know it! Your father was our sort. And you 're a growin' all out 'n it. And Dean too! I kin see it even in Marv, and the little 'uns. What makes it, Dio? Is it the book learnin'? You have n't none so much!"

"Max!" said Dio, with earnestness of strong conviction in her manner, "Max, it's religion makes it."

Max looked in her face, and his countenance fell.

"Yes, I reckon 't is, — religion makes it! Well, good-by, Dio."

He turned and left her, striding homeward, as if he could not get there soon enough. Dio stood still and watched him.

"He thinks he can't get that," thought she. "I ought to tell him he can. I must call him back."

She called "Max! Max! come back!" but he

did not hear, or would not seem to hear. He went into the house and shut the door. Then Dio went on homeward, sober, thoughtful, full of sympathy for this chrysalis struggling to be free of its enshrouding case. Would it ever have wings?



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE NEW HOUSE.

MR. BUDD had advised Dean to put up a house of comfortable size while he was building, — a house that should afford sleeping-rooms for them all: at least so that no more than two need occupy the same room. It would cost less, and look better than making subsequent additions; and, he said, no family ought to be content with less. He offered to loan him what was necessary, on condition that he should work for him winters till it was paid.

The prospect of such a house was so alluring to Dio that she consented to Dean's absence without much demur, and plans were discussed with lively zeal, both by letter and every time they met. Now that they had a team of their own, Dean sometimes came home to spend a Sabbath; Marvel or Rolfe going after him, and taking him back Monday morning. One Saturday evening in February he made an unexpected visit.

That evening Max Boyd drove up in front of Mr. Budd's shop, and, throwing the reins across the backs of his mules, he jumped out and went in. He found Dean, as he had expected, just finishing his day's work and making preparations to leave the shop.

"Did n't know but what ye 'd like to go home to spend Sunday," said Max. "I was up to town with a load, and I 'm comin' with another Monday mornin' early, so I kin fetch ye back as well as not."

"Why, certainly I should like it. I 'm ever so much obliged to you, Max, for thinking of it," said Dean. "Wait a minute or two, while I tell Mrs. Budd, and change my clothes a bit, and get my overcoat."

"Yes, indeed! get yer overcoat. The air is right sharp out on the prairies after nightfall," said Max.

Dean was not long getting ready, and the two were soon traveling rapidly over the hard, smooth roads behind the mules, who, their faces being turned homeward, needed little urging to keep them at their best speed.

They found plenty to talk about for a while.

All the little happenings on Billow Prairie, the Society, the crops, the weather which had been unusually mild and dry, kept them in subjects of conversation for half the way. After that Max grew silent. He seemed to have something on his mind which he did not know how to put into words. After one or two ineffectual attempts to introduce the matter in an easy, natural way, he broke out with, —

“I reckon str’et forrud is the best road, after all. I want to ask ye somethin’, Dean. Ye kin tell me, or not, jest as ye ’re a mind to.”

“All right,” said Dean. “What is it?”

“Your sister Dio is a mighty nice girl,” said Max, with an air of profound conviction.

“Of course I think so,” said Dean, laughing, but rather uneasily, for he guessed what might follow this proposition.

A long pause followed, as if Max found the straight road none too easy. Then he said, —

“I ’m thinkin’ maybe Al Lewis has staked a claim on her, ’fore now.”

“Well, I suppose he has,” said Dean. “We don’t say much about it, Dio is so young, and we can’t spare her from home for a long time yet.

But it's pretty well understood between them, and I'm agreed to it, when the proper time comes."

"Wall, I 'spected as much!" said Max, and whipped up his mules till they went galloping over the prairie at a break-neck pace, which he kept up, for a mile or more, without speaking a word. Then allowing them to subside into a more reasonable rate of travel, he broke the silence with, —

"Mabbe I had n't ought ter say another word, but I must ask this much: You think she likes him? You don't reckon she tuk up with him 'cause there w'an't no bigger feller round, — what could whip two of him; — what would go through fire an' water to git her. You don't 'spose it's that a-way?"

"No, I don't," said Dean unhesitatingly. "Dio is my twin sister, and I should know if it was so, and he should n't have her. Dio likes Albert better than anybody. She chooses him, as he chooses her."

"Enough said," said Max resolutely. "I don't go hangin' round a claim when somebody else has got the first holt of it, — and a good lawful holt,

—not if I know myself. Good luck to Dio an' Albert, I say!"

But he whipped up his mules again not less savagely than before, and shut his mouth with stern resolution.

"There 's other claims, — and good ones," said Dean, wishing to say something comforting.

"Oh, yes!" said Max, "a plenty! I don't happen to be hankerin' after none on 'em jest now, — that 's all."

Dean, seeing that all that could profit was said, changed the subject. They were almost home when Max recurred to it for the last time.

"This about Dio is betwixt you an' me, ye know. Ye need n't speak on it to nobody."

"Of course not," said Dean.

"Not as I 'm anyways ashamed on it," continued Max. "A man must be onsensible not to take to such as Dio. But if she knew on it she might feel like she must be kind o' stiff with me, — knowin' as it was n't no use, — an' ther ain't no need. I sha' n't disturb nobody, and I like to be good friends with her. Dio don't dispise me, if I ain't no scholard."

"Indeed she does n't! And I, — Max, I shall

think the better of you for what you 've said to-night, and the way you meet it."

They grasped hands warmly in the darkness, and the next minute drew up before the door of Dean's home. The welcome Dean received was all the more joyful because he had come unexpectedly, and as soon as Dio learned who brought him, she ran to the door to insist that Max should come in and eat supper with Dean. But he was off already, far beyond her call.

"I invited him to come in," said Dean, when she had given up her hospitable purpose, and turned to shut the door. "He would not stay. The mules are uneasy, and want to get home."

Dio was easily consoled. She was very glad to see Dean. There was always some new point in their house building plans to be discussed, and indeed it was not easy to keep from thinking and speaking of them on Sunday. But Saturday evening and Monday morning they could hardly talk fast enough.

Marvel and Rolfe were getting home the materials for building whenever the roads were good and other duties allowed. Albert Lewis, who was somewhat skillful at carpentry, having built

his father's house with some assistance, offered his services to Dean, to be repaid in kind on demand. This offer had been accepted thankfully, and he and Marvel had the cellar and foundation ready when Dean got home in March.

A site had been chosen for the new house a few rods south of the log cabin, where the ground was a little higher. The old cabin was to be left to the occupancy of the pigs and poultry. It would not be an unsightly thing, for the ivy Mrs. Holt had given Dio years before had grown and stretched itself and clambered over it, trained and encouraged by her zealous labor, till it covered all that side that would be visible from the new dwelling. A trumpet creeper was spreading over another side, and every summer it would throw out its bright red blossoms in gay profusion. The whole structure would shortly be hidden in a wealth of green, and embellished with flowers.

That was a joyful day when Dean came home, and the real work of building began. Dio was so eager and full of interest that her studies would have suffered seriously, only that the necessity of ministering to Miss Felicia still remained,

and when she was once there, the reading went on as usual.

Miss Felicia allowed no moment to go to waste. She could read aloud while Dio worked, and she drilled her and herself at the same time with questions to prove her perfect understanding of the matter, and to fix it in her mind. Dio could have had no better teacher and companion.

As for Miss Felicia, it was not her way to be very demonstrative, but she was really very strongly attached to Dio. Without her, this would have been a dreary winter.

Sometimes Dio had felt that Miss Felicia's sober, practical, sensible friendship was lacking in warmth, and she was greatly pleased when one day she took her by the shoulders, kissed her on either cheek, and said, "I never thought you would be such a comfort to me, Dio, when you came over and stood by our wagon, that day we came to Billow Prairie. You remember how I snapped out at you for looking into our pork barrel. You 've improved a sight since then, and I don't know as I should think any more of you if you were my sister, or my daughter. You seem a little like both."



A few days of preparation, and then the house went up as if by magic; all the labor being done by willing, eager hands, with the knowledge that every advance would be rejoiced over by the whole family at evening. Marvel was especially voluble in expressing his pleasure.

"What would ma say to that?" and, "Would n't ma be pleased?" fell from his lips many times a day. Once he said, "I keep a thinkin' of ma's verse all the time, He *has* 'freely give us all things,' sure enough. Never see how we do get ahead! A good house!—a two-story house! Goin' to paint it, too! I can paint." And so he would run on in a happy, thankful strain.

At length all was done that could be done at present, for the spring work began to call the men-folk to the fields. So the household effects were moved into the new house and the cabin was deserted. True, the house was not nearly finished. The work would go on for many a day, through all possible leisure time that stormy days or fortunate events could afford. But nobody cared much that the finishing must be done over their heads. Every gain would be the more marked and appreciated. For the present they rejoiced in plenty of room and plenty of light.

It was on a Saturday morning that the removal took place. By evening all things were in order. The simple cottage bedsteads that had been waiting for their place were set up. The scarcity of furniture became quite apparent under the new conditions; but this also was but to increase and lengthen out their pleasure, for every new article they would be able to afford would be the more thoroughly appreciated. At least this was the theory Dean and Dio held and merrily taught, as they moved their few poor articles of furniture into the new dwelling.

With hearts full of thanksgiving they knelt for the first time around the family altar in the new home. They thought of the first days in the log house. They thought of their mother, and wished she could witness and share their pleasure. They thought of the one leaf that was all they then had of the Book that had since been a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. The Sabbath that followed was a day of rest and grateful recollections of the manner in which their heavenly Father had led and cared for them, and of bright hope and glad trust for the future.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## A NEW MAN.

WE must now go back a little in our narrative. After Dio's visit to Max she had felt that she must speak to him at the first opportunity, and make him understand, if she could, that religion was for him. But Max had seemed determined to give her no opportunity. He avoided her presence except when surrounded by other young people.

After some thought, and a good deal of prayer for direction, she determined to write him a note. It required some effort to put upon paper what she thought she could have said so simply and easily, if she could but have the chance. She finally wrote this: —

FRIEND MAX, — I have been watching a chance to tell you that you are very much mistaken if you think religion is not for you. It is for you as much as for me, or anybody. Don't think it nothing but a fetter and a hindrance. My father used to say so, and I am so sorry he made such a mistake.

Dean does n't find it so, nor do I, nor does anybody that tries it. It is a help and a joy every day. Do try it, Max.

Your friend,

DIO WINDOM.

Max kept this note in his pocket for days, and read and re-read it. Twice he sat down with pen, ink, and paper before him with the thought of answering it. But he was not a ready writer, and each effort ended in failure and the destruction of much note-paper. The Sabbath after Dean's return he came to Dio and said in a tone intended for her ear alone, —

"I 'm a goin' to try fur it, Dio."

And she had answered, "I 'm very glad, Max."

From that time Max whittled the desks no more in sermon time or Society meeting; nor did he whisper or look about as had been his wont. He listened as if he meant to know and understand all about this thing that he had pledged himself to try for, and the way to get it. He grew grave, even gloomy, and when the services were over he often stalked off alone, with bent head and despondent face.

"Growin' old, Max is!" his younger brother would say, when his rough jokes provoked no

laughter and elicited nothing but a request to leave him alone. "Gettin' religious, ain't ye?" he said one day.

"Yes. That 's what I 'm in fur!" said Max boldly.

Horace laughed uproariously, uncertain, the while, whether his brother was serious or joking. But it was Max's first open confession.

"Reckon I sha' n't invest at present, if it makes folks so mopy," Horace said.

To this Max made no reply.

Dio saw that there was much amiss with Max, but she did not know what to say to him. She could not understand why he should be so despondent. One day he came to her and said, —

"It 's no go, Dio. The fact is, the more I try the more I kin see I ain't fit. The Lord himself can't make no Christian out 'n such as me."

"Yes, he can," said Dio. "Have you asked him?"

"Asked him? Asked him what?" said Max bewildered.

"To make a Christian of you."

"Well, no. I did n't think of it that a-way. I 've been a tryin' to do, and be better, — in fact, to be religious, but it 's no go."

"Max, ask him to make you over new — to make you a Christian," said Dio.

"You think he kin?" said Max doubtfully.

"That 's just what He has to do for everybody. Nobody can make themselves Christians," said Dio.

The gloom did not lighten on Max's face. He looked at Dio a moment, and then said, "How do ye know all that?"

"It 's in the Bible. I can't tell you all the verses, but they 're there, and to-night I 'll look them up, and mark them for you, and you can read them for yourself."

"Well, do it," said Max. "You helped me into this fix, and I reckon ye 're boun' fur to git me out, if ye kin. I doubt if ye kin, though. Ye see, the mater'als is mighty poor. I s'pose ye just think me a green, wuthless sort of a feller, but I 'm more 'n that. I 'm wickedder 'n I ever had an idee on, till lately."

"He 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,'" quoted Dio softly.

Max gave her another gloomy look, and walked away.

Dio felt greatly troubled. She hastened home

that she might lay her burden upon Him who alone was able to help. She felt herself quite unequal to instructing Max. She hurried through her work that she might search her Bible for the texts she knew were there. She had bought a Bible for herself while at Mrs. Lapham's, and in this she marked the passages she found. These were some of them: —

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”*

*“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”*

*“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”*

*“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*

*“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”*

*“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

The next day, seeing Max passing, she went

out and put the Bible into his hand, explaining how she had marked the passages.

"May I keep it awhile?" said Max. "I 'm a goin' to buy me a new Bible when I go up to town. Hain't got none wuth a mentionin' in the house; fore end and back end tore off, and yaller with smoke all the way through. I 've meant to git one ever sence I begun to—to try, but it's a busy time, and I hain't been up."

"Yes; keep it till you get one," said Dio. "I 've marked a good many verses, because I kept finding good ones."

She did not see Max again till the next Sabbath, but then she hardly needed to hear the words he was eager to pour into her ear. He stood straighter, and there was a new light in his eye that told the story. The despondency was all gone. Dio thought she had never seen him look so manly.

"I done it! I jest told Him I was all beat and ready to give up, and asked Him to take the job and make me all over new, and he 's done it! I 'm sure he 's done it, 'cause o' his own words in the Book," said the happy fellow the moment he reached her side.



And Dio could only say, "O Max! I am so glad! — so glad!" She felt like crying for joy. Had it really been given to her to help one out of darkness into light! "I must do more! I must help others! It is so blessed to do such work!" she thought. There was sunshine in her heart and on her face all that day.

When the time came for the Society meeting, Max was all ready and eager to tell of the change that had taken place in him. He said in direct, manly fashion, —

"I 'm a Christian. I 'm willin' to sign that pledge now, any time ye 're willin' to give me one. I lost t'other one, 'cause I did n't keer. Now I keer. I 'm goin' to join the church, if they 'll take me. I don't expect to be no shinin' light, nor piller o' salt in it (Poor Max was a little mixed in his metaphors; he was thinking of the "salt of the earth"), yet awhile, but I kin be a Christian, and I 'm goin' to act like one, every time, so fur as I kin, lookin' to Jesus, the Author and the Finisher."

He sat down, and there was silence. Every face expressed deep interest and feeling. Even Marion's was no exception. Horace tried hard

to look unmoved and careless. His lips put on the shape of whistling, but it was only to conceal and control their tremulousness.

Dean started the hymn, "I was a wandering sheep," and the emotion of all found expression in the singing.

After the hymn, little Mrs. Bradford spoke, without rising, and with her face half hidden by her hand, so timid was she. "I want to be a Christian. I did n't think much about it till my baby came. I think mothers ought to be Christians. Pray for me."

The trembling voice was silent, and Albert Lewis knelt and prayed for these two who were willing to confess Christ, and take his yoke upon them.

When he had done, Marvel prayed. Marvel's prayers were somewhat stereotyped. He had fallen into a form that seemed to him expressive of his wants and feelings, and the effort to express himself in other words was not often made. But this night he felt that something else must be said. So when he had finished he added with solemn earnestness, "I 'm glad there 's two more that 's goin' to be Christians," and sat down.

Then Albert Lewis spoke of the new brother's resolve to join the church, and of a plan that was under discussion for organizing a church on Billow Prairie. If one were formed it would be a church for all. No one would be shut out who founded their faith on God's word, and tried to obey Him. He hoped all the members of the Society would be ready to help on this movement, because the Church is Christ's own institution, and nothing can excuse neglect of that.

When the meeting broke up, Dean was first to grasp Max's hand, and give him welcome; Albert, and John, and Silence Parker were not far behind, and tears rose to the honest fellow's eyes as he realized that, whatever ridicule and distrust he might encounter elsewhere, here he was received as a brother beloved.

"I shall grow!" he said. "Don't git out o' patience with me. I don't know much yit, but I'll learn, fur I feel the makin's of a new man in me. Help me what ye kin, and Jesus is a goin' to be my Finisher. I reckon he won't slight his job, and yer won't always have to be ashamed of me."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## IMPROVEMENT.

MAX called one evening, soon after the events narrated in the last chapter, to see Miss Felicia.

"I reckon ye 've heard as how I 'm a Christian," said he.

"Yes, and I 'm rejoiced to know it," said Miss Felicia. "It 's the best thing that ever happened to you. Not that it happened, either. Things don't happen; — least of all such things as that, though we call it so. But it 'll make your life worth living, and make a man of you. There 's nothing like religion to bring out the best there is in a man, according to my way of thinking."

"I reckon ye 're right," said Max. "I 've seen that myself."

"A man who owns his duty to his Maker, and aims to do it," continued Miss Felicia, "seems to me much more manly than a shirk, who won't own it because he don't wish to do it."

"Well," said Max, " I want to do my duty to Him and to everybody. And I 'm thinkin' I could do it in better shape if I had a little more learnin'. I went to school, same 's other boys, and I might 'a learned more, but rethmetic was the study most to my likin', and I jest pushed her through, — could crack any nut in the hull book, — but grammar and spellin' I did n't take to, and I did n't push much on them. I missed it, there. That 's why I 've come to ye. Ye 're a school-ma'am, and ye can teach me grammar and spellin', and maybe more. I ain't too old to learn, yit, and I ain't a goin' through life bearin' His name and goin' it halt and unequil for want of a few hard knocks at study. I 'll pay what ye ask if ye 'll teach me an hour every evenin'."

"I respect your sense and grit," said Miss Felicia. "It won't come so easy to you as it would earlier, but if you 're determined to learn, you can. I 'll teach you the best I know how."

"I know I 've some 'parts o' speech,' I bleeve they call 'em, that don't belong in any grammar book. If ye 'll jest give me a hint about sech, I 'll set about loppin' of 'em off, one by one. When I git fairly rid of one ye kin tell me of

another, but I reckon one 's about all I kin tackle to a time."

Miss Felicia pondered. The field was wide. Where should she begin? At last she said, —

"I notice you generally say 'We uns,' where most folks say only we. Perhaps you 'd better begin on that."

"I 've lopped her off a'ready," said Max, smiling.

"Have you? That 's a good beginning! Then I must think again," said Miss Felicia.

A spirit so resolute was sure to win. Max came every evening, and his progress was rapid. Working all day he could do no more than he had set himself to do, through the warm weather, and his good sense was evident in attempting no more. But as the fall advanced, and the evenings grew longer, and the labors of the day less exhausting, he began to read, under Miss Felicia's direction, the same books she and Dio had lately finished, and as he read his mind leaped to the work with fresher vigor, and the charm of the pursuit became greater than that of prairie fowl or pickerel had ever been.

Dio saw the improvement and rejoiced in it.

No one could help seeing that Max was as good as his word. He was growing in grace and knowledge. He developed a power of speaking which was very helpful in the prayer meetings. His words were always simple, directly to the point, and marked by excellent sense.

The plan of forming a church, which had been under consideration for a year or more, now took form, and in October Mr. Capen came and organized the church of Billow Prairie with twelve members. Dean's duty to Mr. Budd had called him away early in September, but he came home to be present on this occasion, and to enjoy Mr. Capen's visit.

It was a great pleasure to the Windom family to receive their old friend into their new house, now properly divided into rooms, some of which were finished. And the gratification to him of seeing their prosperity, and their growth, bodily, mental and spiritual, was still greater. They told him freely all their hopes and interests, and he gave them much counsel and encouragement.

They told him about Max Boyd, and Mr. Capen became so much interested that he made

time to visit him. He had a long and deeply interesting talk with him, and was delighted to find one so strong and resolute wholly devoted to God and his work in the world, and apparently only waiting some guiding hand to point out the best way of serving Him. Mr. Capen told of the wide West, and of the great need of men who are not afraid of hardship or privation to go into new places and preach the Gospel and build up churches.

Max's clear, resolute gray eyes kindled as he said, —

"I 'm your man! I mean I 'm His man! Only show me how I can get myself ready. I 'm not fit yet."

Mr. Capen told him how, by a course of study, he might in a few years prepare himself for the work of a home missionary, and Max seized upon the idea at once, for it was work exactly to his mind.

"I jest long to be about it!" said he, as they shook hands at parting; "and you may reckon I won't let any grass grow under my feet. With the help of the Author and the Finisher I 'll be ready for work before many years. You sha' n't



find the time you 've spent on me this mornin' throw'd away, sir."

The succeeding winter was a season of steady improvement, not only to Max, who studied under Miss Felicia's guidance, but to Miss Felicia herself, and to Dio and Albert. The weekly meetings were of lively interest. Mr. Bradford soon followed the lead of his wife, and concluding that fathers, no less than mothers, ought to be Christians, he had given himself to God, and now was ready to help in every good work.

Rolfe, too, stimulated by Mr. Capen's visit, came out boldly, and declared himself on the Lord's side, and was as firm and manly as a boy of sixteen should be.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## A PRODIGAL.

PROBABLY John Faxon himself did not realize what kind of a spirit animated him, this winter, to begin to stir up in Marvel's mind feelings of jealousy and distrust toward his younger brother. Artful questions, slight insinuations, continually repeated, were slow in taking effect, but in time they took root and grew in Marvel's mind. Their first visible effect was increasing indifference to the Society and its meetings, and a sullenness of manner, to which he had been inclined in his boyhood, but had apparently overcome.

This became plain whenever Dean was at home. All through the spring and early summer the younger brother was perplexed and distressed by its manifestation, but sought vainly to find out the cause. Meanwhile, John Faxon, having, as he imagined, caught scent of an injustice, and set himself to right it, kept up his secret methods of poisoning the poor simple fellow's mind.

"You 're jest workin' all the time for Dean's int'rist," he would say. "He 's got everything into his hands. He 's boss, but he don't pay you a cent. You jest git your board an clo'es for all you do. I would n't stan' it, if I was you."

"I reckon Dean 'll do what 's right," had been Marvel's reply, when these insinuations began. But later he had no word to say in Dean's defense, and at length learned to reply in stout assertions that he was n't going to "stan' it" much longer.

Still there was no outbreak for a long time. In fact, Marvel's confidence in Dean had become so fixed, and was so well grounded, that John Faxon, though he might shake it, and appear to loosen it, was never able to uproot it. Away from the influence of his instigator, Marvel settled back into his old habit of trusting to his brother, and following his lead, though showing a degree of sullenness at times that was new and exceedingly unpleasant, being extended to every member of the little home circle impartially.

"Do try to be decent, Marv! You eat like a savage!" exclaimed Dio one morning at breakfast.

"Eat jest as I allus did!" retorted Marvel, irritated as much by the tone and manner as by the reproof.

It was a sultry August day. Dio's rest had been disturbed by a grumbling tooth, and the pain, aggravated by bending over the hot stove while getting breakfast, had become severe. She thought she could n't help being cross, so she answered, —

"You always did eat like a savage. I should think you might improve."

"Reckon I better not eat at all, if I can't eat to suit folks. Reckon this fam'ly is gettin' above me! I better find another place to live," and Marvel pushed his chair back from the table, and shuffled outdoors, the very picture of angry sullenness.

Dio was ashamed of her crossness, but she had not the grace to say so, or to call back and soothe her offended brother, though she was certain he was going off to his work with an appetite but half satisfied, and a just anger against her in his heart.

She endured a conscience ache in addition to her toothache part of the forenoon. Then she

prepared a nice lunch of bread, cold chicken, doughnuts and curds, such as Marvel liked, and a pitcher of cool water in which was a preparation of oatmeal, sugar and nutmeg, a refreshing drink in hot weather, and sent Vinnie with this peace-offering to the upper end of the farm where she supposed he was working.

Vinnie disappeared among the tall corn that waved its tassels high above her head, and was gone half an hour or more, when she returned with glowing face and the report that Marvel was not there. It was too much to ask that she go, in her heated condition, as far in the opposite direction, to the place where Dean and Rolfe were making hay, and where Dio thought Marvel would probably be found. She looked up at the clock, and thought it would scarcely be two hours before they would all come to dinner. So she allowed Vinnie to regale herself on the lunch, while she lowered the pitcher into the well that it might be cool on her brother's return.

But when at twelve o'clock Dean and Rolfe came to dinner Marvel was not with them, and they had seen nothing of him. With a quick recollection of his words at breakfast Dio exclaimed excitedly, —

"He 's gone, then! Oh, dear, where would he go!"

"Gone! where? What 's the matter, Dio?" said Dean. "What if he is gone? There 's half a dozen places where he might go. He 'll be back soon, or if he is n't he 's sure to get his dinner somewhere."

"Oh, but you don't know!" said Dio, the tears that had been ready to flow many times that forenoon now breaking bounds and flooding her cheeks. "You got through breakfast and went out so quick, that you did n't hear the cross things I said to him. And then he said he 'd go away, for we were getting too fine for him, or something like that. And he is gone, and I—oh dear! I 've got just the pay I deserve!" and poor Dio had much ado to keep her tears from dropping among the potatoes she was taking up from the kettle.

"Let me do that," said Dean, taking the dish and the fork from her with gentle force. "You ought not to be getting dinner, anyway. You 're just about sick. Where 's Vinnie that she can't help?"

"She 's gone to the well for drink. She has

helped," sobbed Dio. "I sent her with a nice lunch to Marv at the north end, two hours ago, and he was n't there. I thought perhaps he had gone to help you, but now I know he 's gone quite away, and does n't mean to come back," and with a fresh burst of tears Dio threw herself into a chair, and hid herself and her grief in the folds of her big apron.

"Twinnie, don't!" said Dean as he continued at the work of taking up the dinner. "Marv would n't go off to stay! I'm sure he would n't. He 's at the Lewis' or at John Faxon's perhaps. He 'll be back by evening, if not sooner."

"I don't know," said Rolfe in his slow, quiet way. "Marvel has been getting all out of sorts lately. Maybe he would go away."

"Out of sorts? How? Do you know what is the matter? What has he said?" asked Dean, piling one question upon another in his eagerness. "I've noticed that he has n't been like himself, but I could n't find out what was the matter."

"He won't talk to anybody much, but he has grumbled some, — partly to himself, — but I heard," said Rolfe.

"What is it about? Out with it!" said Dean impatiently.

"Why, I reckon John Faxon put it into his head, but he says you 've got possession of the farm, and you boss everything, and he 's your man — without any pay."

"What nonsense!" cried Dean. "Are n't we all working hard for the family? Do I care for anything only to see you all comfortable? And does n't he know that I can't hold property till I 'm twenty-one? Mr. Budd is holding the farm for us all. It 's no more mine than it is his, or yours, and it 's just clear mischief-making in John Faxon if he 's set Marv on to believe that I 'm planning anything but the good of the whole family."

"Do you suppose you can find him?" asked Dio, revealing part of her tear-stained face.

"Find him? Yes, indeed! Where would he go but to John Faxon? Marv would n't go among strangers. Let 's have dinner, and then I 'll take Nell, and I 'll soon find him and make all right."

But when Dean reached John Faxon's house he found that he had miscalculated. Marvel had



not been there. He scarcely knew in what direction to look next. He had been so certain of finding him there that he had not turned aside to inquire of nearer neighbors.

He spoke not a word to John of what Rolfe had told him. He thought it best to find Marvel first, and be sure how much real sense of offense he had. He made a circuit and stopped at all his neighbors' to inquire if they had seen Marvel. No one had seen him. So he returned to Dio to consult with her.

Dio was a good deal disappointed, for she had been quite hopeful that Marvel would be found at Mr. Faxon's, and that Dean would bring him home. She was confirmed now in the belief that he had left home with deliberate purpose.

"I don't know where to look next," said Dean. "I really think he 'll come home to-night. He has n't spent a night away from home but once since we moved down here, and you remember that time. He started for Ball City with Max Boyd, and they were to be gone a week, but Marv was so homesick that he left Max to go on alone, while he walked home again, and got back before nightfall the second day. He 's never

wanted to go away since. I don't believe it is best to make a fuss, and go scouring the country round. He 'll come back himself, — see if he does n't."

"I don't know," said Dio sorrowfully.

"Well, I do! At least, I feel quite sure. Don't you remember when we first moved into this house he did n't sleep, and worried the rest of us half the night because he was n't in his old corner? The best thing we can do is to wait. No harm will come to him."

"Seems as if I could n't wait," said Dio, wiping away a tear. "I keep thinking what ma would say to me. Ma set as much by Marv as if he was n't a plague and a torment every day of her life. And now that he 's so good, to think that I could n't have patience with his ways, but must drive him away from home."

"Twinnie, dear, don't worry like that. Ma always knew Marv was a trial, and I think she 'd be pleased that we have got on so well with him. I hope she knows. At any rate, he is one of the Lord's own children, so he 's sure of the best of care."

"That is a comfort," said Dio. "I know Marv

would never have taken up any such jealous thoughts of you out of his own head. It's that mean John Faxon's work."

"Well, let's just wait a while. Rolfe may not be altogether right in his reckoning. His imagination may have magnified John's meddling."

It was not so, however. On the contrary, Rolfe did not know, or suspect, half the truth. When Marvel left home, all the evil thoughts that had been suggested to him during the past months, stirred up by the angry taunt of his sister, were seething in violent agitation in his heart. He determined to go, — he cared little where, but somewhere to hide from his family so effectually that they should search for him in vain. So, instead of taking the road, he started across the prairie westward, with a vague idea of going to that ever receding country, "Out West."

He avoided all dwellings of men till he was fairly out of reach of any who knew him. He was, for several hours, insensible to hunger or thirst. He nursed his anger, and fanned the excited state of feeling under which he had set out, till at last his strength and fortitude gave way together. Tired, heated, dusty, faint for

lack of food, for his breakfast had been but a light one, he sank in a heap in the shade of an old buttonwood-tree that stood near a creek which he was approaching. Angry still, and wholly miserable, he began to cry.

His tears brought some relief. The tension of feeling was relaxed, and after sobbing awhile he fell asleep. Noon came and passed into afternoon, and still he slept. The shade of the tree moved away from him, and he lay in the hot August sunshine, still sleeping heavily. It was three o'clock when he awoke, conscious only of a ravenous hunger. He sat up and looked around him. Slowly his situation dawned upon his mind. The violence of his anger had passed away. As he thought it all over, there arose a sullen sense of injury, but hunger and thirst overpowered every other feeling.

"Wish 't I could buy some bread 'thout nobody seein' me," he muttered, fingering a few coins that chanced to be in his pocket, "or some eggs!" The distant cackle of a hen perhaps suggested the latter thought. "Wish 't I could buy o' that hen," — with a short laugh at the idea. "Don't want to see nobody, nor speak to nobody.

Jest want somethin' to eat, — and then to get on."

He rose, crossed the creek on a fallen log, and pushed on toward the sounds he had heard. As he expected, he soon came in sight of a house with outbuildings around it. The stable was nearer than the house, and a good distance lay between them. No one was in sight about either. Marvel went toward the stable, and keeping it between himself and the house, stole slyly in at the door, and looked about eagerly in boxes and barrels where hens were likely to make their nests. He soon found where Biddy had deposited her egg. There were two in the nest. These Marvel took, and searched in vain for more. But to steal them was not his plan. He spread a piece of paper in the nest from which he had taken the eggs, and on this he laid three cents, which he judged a fair price for what he had taken.

Then he went to a well near the house, and drew up a bucket of water, and took a long, delicious draught. Then, having seen, or been seen, by no one, he went his way.

Refreshed by the food thus obtained he traveled on, taking the roads now that he was in

a region where he was a stranger. Nightfall found him, weary and footsore, wondering, with a strange homesick yearning, where he was to sleep. The weather was warm enough, and new, clean straw-stacks were plentiful; but as twilight deepened into darkness, he more and more craved human companionship, and to sleep elsewhere than under a roof seemed impossible.

Nevertheless, he shrank from going into a house to ask for lodging. The companionship of cows and horses would be better than none. He slipped quietly into the open door of a stable where a cow was lying at rest, vigorously chewing the cud, and her calf, tied by a bit of rope, stood near her. It was quiet till Marvel came in sight, but on seeing him it began to low for its supper.

Marvel looked about for a place to lie down where he would not be seen if any one should come into the stable. There was not much in the stable, — a few barrels and boxes, but not an egg in any, as he quickly found out. He was hungry again, and was more disappointed at finding nothing to satisfy him than at finding nothing but the bare ground to lie down upon.

He stretched himself in the corner nearest the cow, — so near that he could plainly hear her breathing, and tried to be content and go to sleep.

But sleep did not come at his bidding. The long nap in the daytime, the strangeness, the hunger, and in very truth the homesickness that Dean had prophesied, did not help to bring slumber. His imagination ran on what they would be thinking and saying at home, now that night had come and he had not returned. He did not suppose they would be much surprised, or at all alarmed that he did not come home during the day. But that he should stay away all night would, he thought, give them a considerable and well-deserved fright. They would begin to inquire and look for him in the morning.

So strong were the home-longings that he would now gladly have afforded them a clew by which they might find him, and beg and entreat him to come home again, — and then he would go. He thought of his neat chamber and comfortable bed at home. He thought of the corner where he knelt to repeat his nightly prayer. He had not prayed once all day.

"Ought to say my prayers!" he muttered, and crept up upon his knees, and began to repeat the form of prayer he was accustomed to use. But he stumbled over the words, and he felt no satisfaction in the act. He grew more uneasy.

"Don't know what God thinks o' me runnin' away from my folks so. 'Fraid I 've been too riled up 'bout nothin'. Dean allers was good. I 'spect maybe he means to do what 's right by all of us. But Dio was cross to me. And I guess I 've got the right to go away, and not work for Dean 'thout pay."

Thus conscience struggled with anger and resentment. He laid himself down again. Then steps were heard approaching the stable, — soft, light steps. They entered the door, and a fresh, cheerful girl's voice spoke. The moon gave light enough so that Marvel could see the form. He could not distinctly see the face of the girl. She carried a pail in her hand.

"Poor bossy!" said she. "Did you think you were to be left to starve? I almost forgot you."

She set the pail into a small square box, fixed against the wall to receive it, patted the little creature on the head, watched its eager drink-



ing for a moment, and then went back to the house.

"I must have a drink of that milk!" exclaimed Marvel, springing up the moment she was gone, under the strong impulse of hunger and thirst. "Reckon bossy won't grudge me a little, seein' I ain't had no supper, nor much dinner."

He wrenched the pail away from the calf, who seemed very unwilling to lose its supper, and raising it to his lips drank eagerly. It was not milk. Marvel hardly knew what it was: some kind of porridge made of coarse meal, he thought; but what was good for a calf could not hurt him, and he was famished. He was not accustomed to go hungry, and he actually thought he was near to starvation. So he drained the last drop, and set the pail in its place with a sigh of relief.

"I kin pay the folks, same 's I did for the eggs," he soliloquized; "but I can't make it up to the calf, nohow. Poor little feller."

He lay down again thinking how very much like the prodigal son he was, in being glad to get a part of the food intended for a calf. Half resolved to turn about and go back to his home as soon as day dawned, he fell asleep.

He awoke long before day. The stable door was shut, and all was darkness around him. He sat up and stared into the blackness, unable, for a little while, to remember where he was. The hard ground beneath him, and the loud breathing of the cow beside him, filled him with terror. But presently recollection returned, and the fear gave place to keen pangs of homesickness.

"Wish 't I was home! Oh, I do! Reckon I 've been a fool," he soliloquized. "Wish 't I was home! Dio might scold me all she 's a mind to. Want to see Dio, an' Dean, and the baby! Ma's baby 's gettin' a big girl. 'Must n't call her Baby,' Dio says. 'She 's Mattie.' Wonder when it 'll be mornin'! I 'll go home in the mornin', sure! It 's an awful ways. Oh, dear! Wish 't I was home!"

He lay back in his place, but there was no more sleep for him. Homesickness was strong upon him, and he turned from side to side, restless and unhappy. At last he rose to his feet, saying, "Reckon I 'll go home now. Bright moonlight outdoors, if I can only get that door open agin. 'I will arise and go unto my — home,'" with thoughts of the prodigal in mind. "Home 's

the best place, and when a feller has got a good home he better stay there."

He stumbled and fell over the calf trying to find the door, and when at last he found it, it was fastened on the outside. He was a prisoner. There was no help for it. He must stay and await the dawn with what patience he could.

"Spect the man that fastened the door 'll come out in the mornin' to milk, and I 'll be caught here!"

He groaned aloud at the thought. Oh, to get out! Oh, to get out, and away, unseen! He could not bring himself to lie down in his uneasiness. He stood long with his hand on the door. Then, growing weary, he sat down close to it, always thinking what the owner of the place would think of him and say to him when he should find him there in the morning. He shrank from the encounter he foresaw with unaccountable fear and dread.

"Never slept in nobody's barn afore! Ain't a tramp, — nohow. But he 'll think I am. Maybe he 'll swear at me. Hate to be sweared at. Even John Faxon don't swear at me no more. Wish 't I could get out! Oh, wish 't I was home!"

With much soliloquizing after this sort the weary hours rolled by, till the cocks began to herald the approach of day. At last the daylight began to be visible through the interstices of the logs of which the stable was built; and after awhile Marvel could see what was around him. Again he looked eagerly about for something, — anything, behind which he might hide from the eyes of the farmer, whom he expected to hear coming any moment. There was absolutely nothing at all adequate to the purpose. He pushed hard at the door. It did not yield. He examined carefully to see if he could not find out how it was fastened, and undo it. However it was, it was not to be opened from the inside.

He heard a door opening, and voices. Now it was coming, and he must face it. The poor lad shrank, cowering, into the darkest corner. A cold perspiration broke out all over him, and he trembled violently, overcome by a genuine panic, — unreasonable and unreasoning. He had just sense enough left to run to his only refuge.

“O Lord! O my Lord!” he called in a hoarse whisper, “help me now, and I ’ll do jest whatever you want me to.”

Then came the drawing of a bolt on the stable door, and the morning light came flooding in. But while Marvel, quailing, waited to face the comer, the fresh, girlish voice was heard calling from the house door, —

“A pail of water, before you milk, please, father!”

“All right,” came the answer, and a milking-pail was set in at the open door, and then receding steps told Marvel that the coast was clear.

He hurried to peep out. The man’s back was towards him, as he went to the well. The girl was not to be seen. Marvel lost no time in getting outdoors, and putting the barn between himself and the house. Then he hurried off as fast as his feet could carry him, ejaculating, “I thank my Lord! I thank my Lord!” with real fervency, and unspeakable relief.

When he was fairly off the premises, and in the road, he felt that he might slacken his steps.

“Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee.” The words came singing joyfully through Marvel’s mind. He had read and heard them often, but he had never before repeated them. He did not know that he could. When he

had wished to repeat a verse of Scripture in his turn at the Society meetings, he had often been at a loss, unable to recall a single line in correct form. But over and over and over these words flowed through his mind, till he said them aloud in his exultation.

"Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee."

"Now, I reckon, he wants me to go right back home, and I 'm a goin'," said Marvel decidedly.

He had come out on the west side of the barn, and his flight had been toward the west. Therefore he must retrace his steps. He turned and began to walk toward the house. His fright was all over and gone. He walked on, confident of his claim to a share of the road, and strong in a right resolution.

Just then that same clear voice rang out over the prairie, with the call, "Break-fa-a-ast!"

How often, when at home, had he been summoned from his work by exactly such a cry from Dio's lips, and how joyfully had he responded! How hungry he was now! He wondered if they would give him breakfast, if he paid for it. He

dived into his pocket, and brought up a quarter, and a dime.

"I 'm a goin' to ask. It 's a free country, and nobody can't be hung for askin', — specially when they can pay."

He hurried on, full of confidence and joyful expectation; a wholly different person from the lad who had cowered behind the stable door. He came up to the farmer's side just as he was going in.

"Will you give me some breakfast this mornin'? I 'm willin' to pay fur it," said he displaying his money.

It was a ruddy, genial face that met his. And the reply was just what the face would lead one to expect.

"Come right in! You 're welcome! Must have made an early start this morning. Here, daughter, we 've got company to breakfast. Put on another plate."

The rosy face of the girl was exactly after the type of the father's. She obeyed smilingly, and invited Marvel to a place at the table.

"I sh'd like to wash my face an' hands first," said he bashfully.

The girl replied by filling a tin wash-basin with water, and setting it on the bench beside the door, where her father had just performed his ablutions. "Here, then," she said, laying a clean towel beside it.

Marvel made very thorough work with his face and hands. He felt as if he could n't be clean enough to sit down at that cosey, well-arranged table, with its snow-white cloth, and shining silver. It seemed strange to see such things in a little log house, where everything else, except perhaps the inmates, was as rough and plain as could be. He wished he could do something to make his hair smooth and neat, but he had neither brush nor comb, and dared not ask for one. He smoothed it with his hands as best he could, and sat down at the table.

"I hope you are looking for work," said the farmer. "I want help the worst way, and I 'll give you whatever wages I find you able to earn, if you 'll stay with me two or three weeks at least."

Marvel looked at the rosy-faced girl, and the inviting breakfast, and felt that it was a temptation; but he answered, "Thank ye, but I can't



stay. I 'm goin' home. They need me there the worst way."

"Well, I 'm sorry. I hoped a hand had come along to give me a lift. I 'll have to look up somebody. Have you walked far this morning?"

"Not fur," said Marvel stammeringly, and with a sudden rush of color to his face, — "no, not fur."

His host noticed his embarrassment. "Slept in some straw-stack about here, likely," was his mental comment. But he asked no more questions. The father and daughter appeared to be the sole occupants of the little home. Marvel wondered if from this family, also, the mother was gone to return no more, and the girl had to fill her mother's place, as Dio did. But he dared not ask. He wished he knew her name. Her father called her only "Daughter," or sometimes, playfully, "Dot."

When the meal was finished, she rose, and brought to her father a Bible, from which he read. They then knelt in prayer. This gave Marvel great satisfaction.

"That 's the way we do at home," he said when they had arisen.

"Is it? I 'm right glad of that!" said the

farmer. "You like it, I see. Give us your hand! I 'm always glad to meet one of the Lord's followers. You 're that, are n't you?"

"Yes, I am," said Marvel, shaking hands. "Now I must go. Here 's the pay for my breakfast."

"I could n't think of taking a cent. I 'm too glad to have a visitor. Keep your money till you 're among strangers. We 're kinsfolk, you know."

"Well, I thank ye kindly," said Marvel, quite in a glow with pleasure and gratitude. He shook hands with the girl also, and started out at the door. A thought turned him back.

"Will ye take that?" he said, offering a dime. "It is n't for the breakfast. I—I don't like to tell what it 's for, but I 'll feel better if ye take it."

"I don't see how I can take it, not knowing what it 's for," said the farmer. "If you 've had anything more of me than breakfast you 're welcome to it."

Marvel hesitated, — looked into the good, genial face before him, and burst forth with, —

"Reckon I 'll tell you all about it, after all.

Ye see, I got angry, an' foolish like, an' I come away from home, — as good a home as any body 's got. I walked all day, an' come night I was that fagged out that I was glad to sleep on your stable floor, — an' that hungry that I did n't scorn to drink of the stuff the calf had for his supper. Don't want to steal nothin', so take the dime."

The farmer laughed heartily. "So you slept in my stable, did you? How did you get out this morning, and I not see you?"

Marvel told him. He laughed again.

"Well, well! and you 're going home now?"

Marvel nodded. "I am that," said he decidedly.

"That 's right. Keep your dime. I don't want it. Ha! ha! And, Dot, give that calf an extra quart of porridge this morning. Ha! ha! ha! Good-by, my lad."

He walked off to the barn, while Marvel still stood looking helplessly at his dime, and from that to the girl, who had listened, much amused, but afraid to laugh lest her visitor should be too much disconcerted.

"Good-by," said she kindly.

"Good-by," replied Marvel," and thank ye too."

He actually took off his hat and made her a bow, as he had sometimes seen Dean do, so lifted out of himself and his own awkwardness was he by her polite and kind manner.

He walked away, looking back frequently to meet her smile as she watched his departure.

"She 's nice! — nice as a new gold pin!" said he, when he could no longer see her. "I do' know but she 's most nicer than Dio. Wonder if my Lord does n't like that kind better 'n such rough uns as me. Sh'd think he would. Reckon I might be some nicer if I tried hard. Made a bow jest as good as Dean does. I 'm goin' to improve. Dio 'll see if I don't. Did n't eat like a savage 'fore that girl, anyhow. I was keerful an' slow. I know now how Dio meant, — like a dog eats, — gobblin' of it down! Don't eat that way no more. My Lord don't like it no better 'n Dio does, I reckon. Goin' to please him all I can, 'cause he 's been good to me. 'Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee!'" and Marvel walked on homeward, singing his verse over and over as he went.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## SOLDIERS OF THE CROSS.

THE work of the day was done, and Dean, with his younger brother and sisters, were sitting around the open door, singing the hymns with which they often prolonged the family worship, when Marvel, weary, footsore, and hungry, came in sight. They all ran out to meet him, and brought him in with great rejoicing. Dio clung to his arm and tried to tell him how sorry she had been for the cross words she had spoken, but there was such a tumult that her apology was drowned in it. When it had a little subsided, they all saw how weary, and guessed how hungry the wanderer was, and a meal was quickly prepared and set before him.

He had not spoken many words. To Dio he said, "It 's all right. I 'm goin' to improve," and kissed her, — a thing he had never done before since her recollection. He kissed little Martha again and again, and returned Dean's

warm, brotherly greeting with one as hearty. When seated at his meal, utterly wearied out as he was, he did not forget a proper regard to his new resolutions. But rest was the thing he needed most of all, and as soon as his hunger was satisfied he went up to his own dear room, and gladly lay down in his own bed.

Dean did not neglect to find an early opportunity to talk matters over with his brother, and come to an understanding with him. This was not hard, as Marvel seemed entirely cured of his jealousy since his return home. He had come to a settled conclusion that all that John Faxon had been putting into his head was wrong and evil, and therefore displeasing to his Lord, whom he now seemed, more than ever before, intent upon pleasing. He protested that he wished nothing but that matters should go on as usual.

But Dean was determined that since Marvel was the oldest, he should be pushed to the front more than he had been. He felt sure that he was now in such a frame of mind that he would take no important step without due consultation with the rest, and it would therefore be safe for him to have the direction of affairs, and it would do

him good to do so. From this time he was careful, after expressing his ideas and opinions, to leave decisions with Marvel. The effect of the new responsibility was soon apparent in Marvel's increasing manliness and dignity, while he exhibited an almost painful solicitude that all should be done in accordance with the united wisdom of the family.

Miss Felicia came to see Marvel as soon as she knew of his return home. He was quite abashed before her, as he had been in the habit of consulting her on all occasions till lately. He would have avoided the interview if he could. He had dreaded and yet longed to see her and have her verdict on his behavior.

"Why, Marvel!" said she, coming in with her free, strong step, — she was quite over her lameness now, — and her cheerful, wholesome, homely face beaming with friendliness, "I'm glad to see you home again. What have I done that you can't trust me any more? You used to believe in me, as a friend, at least."

"So I do now, Miss F'licia!" said Marvel, rising and shaking the hand she offered, while still unable to face her in his shamefacedness.

"Then why did you go off so, and never tell me a word about it? I could have told you a thing or two about John Faxon, and saved you all that long tramp."

"Reckon I 'd better," he replied, giving her his chair and then backing into another so awkwardly, in his confusion, that he had nearly seated himself upon the floor. Having recovered himself and gained his seat, he tipped back on two legs of the chair as a means of restoring his mental equipoise, and went on, "Reckon I was boun' to go off foolin'. Learnt me some lessons! Do me more good than harm, maybe."

"I hope so, I 'm sure," said Miss Felicia. "But I don't like it, nevertheless. And I don't understand it."

"Ye can't understand it, 'cause there wa' n't no sense into it. I ain't goin' to do so no more, Miss F'licia. I 've made up my mind that my friends is my friends, and I 'm goin' to trust to 'em, 'fore all the world."

"That 's right! Your friends are worthy of trust, and you ought to have confidence enough in them to talk things over with them, and be sure that they mean right and will do right if you only give them the chance."



"I know it, — I know it now! I 'm a-goin' to act upon it futur' to come, Miss F'licia."

One way in which Marvel showed a desire and purpose to improve was in his use of language. Not, however, by the correction of the constant inaccuracies so much as by the introduction of new and "big" words, which, as he did not fully understand their meaning, were sometimes ludicrously inapt and ambiguous. Miss Felicia noticed this, with an amused recollection of the same trait in his father; and quietly tried to turn it to account by correcting Marvel's mistakes in her answers. She therefore replied, —

"I suppose I shall have to forgive you. But you must promise to tell me, in future, about your plans, just as you always have."

"I will, Miss F'licia! I will, and be glad to, if yer 'll please be so good as to disremember this one time."

"We 'll forget it altogether," said Miss Felicia, "and that 's better yet. At least, I like the word forget when it comes to our sins and follies. 'Forgetting the things that are behind,' you know the good Word says."

"Does it say so?" said Marvel in pleased sur-

prise. "Why, now, I 'm glad of that! It 's a heap of comfort to be let to forget it all, when ye 've been foolish, and gone wrong and disgraceful. Miss F'licia, it come to me all to once when I was away that my Lord likes nice folks. I 'm goin' to try to be nice."

"I think he likes good folks, whether they are nice or not," said Miss Felicia. "The most important thing is to be good."

"Oh, I know that. I 'm goin' fur that more 'n I ever did before. But I think nice ways will please him a little too, so I 'm goin' in fur them."

"Well," said Miss Felicia, "I would."

"And you 'll help me? 'Cause ye always knew how, better 'n most round here."

"Yes, I 'll help you all I can," said Miss Felicia kindly. "And now tell me all that happened to you while you were away."

While Marvel did this Miss Felicia did not fail to notice the new tenderness and reverence with which he constantly made use of the endearing term, "my Lord," in telling how he had been helped, and guided, and comforted; and she thought it was perhaps true that the expe-

rience had done him more good than harm. He seemed, certainly, to have made a decided advance in the development of Christian character.

After Miss Felicia had gone another caller stopped at the door. Max Boyd had come with a double errand. He had just learned that John Faxon and his wife were both ill with malarial fever; and as there was considerable sickness in the neighborhood, no one could be found to care for them but an old lady, who was quite too feeble to do all that was necessary. A man's strong arm was needed to supplement her weakness, and also to care for the stock.

Marvel had dreaded to face John Faxon's ridicule much more than Miss Felicia's kindly judgment, and had been secretly glad that he had not yet met him. But now he did not hesitate to offer his services.

"I would have gone myself," said Max, "but I 'm off for Kidder to-morrow. That 's the other part of my errand, — to tell you, and say 'good-by.' Mr. Capen got me the chance: — a place where my work nights and mornings will pay my board. For the rest, I 've been saving up some considerable, so I shall manage to get

along. Thank the Lord my way is open now, and it won't be my fault, I hope, if I don't get there."

"How are you going? It 's a long way to Kidder, is n't it?" asked Dio.

"Yes, it 's a good stretch, I believe. Horace will take me a day's ride with the mules, and then I 'm going to foot it. Can't waste money on railroads, you know. I can walk on 'em though. That won't cost me anything, and it 's the shortest and straightest road a body can find."

"Reckon you 'll get tired 'fore you get there, if it 's fur," said Marvel, with his late experience in mind. "But then you ain't lame, and you 're powerful strong."

"Yes, I 'm strong, —strong for *Him!* —so I 've to make the very most of my strength. I don't mean to fool none of it away."

"No," said Marvel humbly. "I don't 'spect you will. But I must be goin'. John Faxon needs me, and my strength is fur *Him* too, —such as 't is."

Max had not intended the rebuke that Marvel appropriated to himself. He offered his hand

to Marvel as he was turning to go away, having made a few slight preparations. "You and I are both in the same army, and in the same regiment too. Soldiers of the Cross! Ain't we, Marv?"

"That we are!" said Marvel taking the offered hand with a brightening face. "Yes. Soldiers of the Cross! Good-by."

"Good-by, Marv," said Max warmly. Marvel started on his walk. Max lingered yet a little longer to talk over his prospects with Dean and Dio, and then said good-by to them and galloped off down the road and out of their sight.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## A FAITHFUL PRIVATE.

MARVEL walked away over the prairie toward John Faxon's thinking over Max's last words. "Soldiers of the Cross," he mused. "Yes, yes, that 's it! I want to be a good soldier. Reckon Max 'll git to be an officer some day. I can't be nothin' but a private, — a poor private all the days of my life. I 'd like to be somethin' more, but I ain't fit."

He fell into a despondent mood, and walked on in gloomy silence for a while. All at once he stopped, and slapping his hands together vigorously he said, "Git out behind me, Satan! I 'll be jest the faithfulest private 'at ever I kin. I won't miss o' doin' one least little thing 'at He gives me to do. Here 's for John Faxon's and work for my Lord! Reckon him as got only one talent might ha' got jest as good a word from *Him* as them two others, if he 'd only done the best he could with the one."

He started on briskly, singing aloud, —

I'll do with my might what my hands find to do.

Marvel rarely got anything in exactly the right words, but he was now in exactly the right spirit.

When he reached John Faxon's he found enough to do to keep both head and hands full. He was needed as much indoors as out. The neglected baby was creeping about the dirty floor wailing fretfully, while the old woman, Mrs. Dimon, who seemed even more inefficient than feeble, was trying to bring a half dead coal fire, choked with ashes and cinders, to life, that she might prepare some nourishment for the poor child.

Emily, on her bed, burning with fever, was chafing with irritation and disquiet at the condition of things around her, and full of fears for her baby.

"O Marvel," said she when she saw him come in, "never was a woman gladder to see anybody than I am to see you! We 're all sick, — goin' to die, I reckon; and there 's that poor baby, — nobody to take care of her. She 's just crying with hunger, and that old thing," with a con-

temptuous motion toward old Mrs. Dimon, who proved to be nearly deaf, "she does n't know a thing only how to smoke her pipe. Can't even keep the fire goin'. Do build up a new fire for her, and then take up the baby and quiet her till she can have something to eat."

Marvel set himself to work without delay. He soon had the stove cleared, and a fresh fire burning. The ashes and cinders, which were strewn almost to the middle of the room, he swept up and carried outdoors.

Mrs. Dimon had picked up the baby and settled into a chair as soon as she saw that some one had come to her relief. The poor little thing continued fretting, seeming to regard such tending as little better than none. So Marvel now took her that the old woman might prepare her food.

"Give her a clean dish," called Emily from the bed. "She 's used that one till it 's sour, I 'm sure; and she 's burned the milk on till it is n't fit to feed the cat in. I can't make her hear or understand a thing I say. She just pokes about and does her own ways. Give her a clean dish from the cupboard, and then do wash that poor



child and make her comfortable, so she can go to sleep after she 's fed."

"I will," said Marvel cheerfully. "I know how. Reckon I 've done it often enough for our Mattie. She 'll be all right soon as she 's had her supper."

With the baby on his arm, he went to the cupboard and found a clean, bright tin, which he put into the old woman's hands, taking from her the one she was about to use; and then he washed the baby's face and hands, and put warm, dry clothing upon her, and combed the tangles out of her shining hair, charming or astonishing her into quiet all the while.

When she had been fed she was laid in her cradle, where she fell asleep almost immediately. Then, having moved the cradle to the foot of the bed where she could see for herself that her little one was sleeping sweetly, he brought water and washed Emily's hot face and hands, and gave her her medicine, after which she was more quiet and comfortable.

John had not yet been as sick as Emily. He was struggling desperately with the disease that was daily gaining a stronger hold upon him. He

had attended upon his sick wife, and his child, while almost too dizzy and sick to stand. Just before Marvel's entrance he had given up, for the first time, to his feelings, and thrown himself upon a lounge in the corner of the room, unable to give his help though they should all die together.

But there were times when he could sit up, and even walk outdoors a little. His fever was intermittent, and was at its height at the moment of Marvel's coming.

He was not less relieved at the sight of him than Emily had been, but he was too bitterly cross and angry at the situation to speak at all, so he simply lay still, giving no sign of life or interest.

When a degree of order and comfort had been restored to the room, and Marvel began to think what work there might be outdoors for him to do, he turned to the master of the house for directions.

" 'T ain't no consequence about things outdoors, Marv," he replied. "You 'll milk the cows, and feed the horses, of course. I 've made out to do it, so fur. But the harvestin' can go undone. It won't make a mite of difference, if we 're all goin' to die, and I reckon maybe we are. Looks

like it. I git worse every day, and Emily every minit. Jest you take care o' things in the house. When the doctor comes, listen sharp to what he says do for Emily. See that she has her medicines regular, and the baby its milk. Don't trust anything to the old woman. I've tried to see to it, but I've got to where I can't trust myself to remember."

Having given Marvel these instructions, John gave himself up to moaning and groaning on his own account. He was no patient sufferer. He had not known sickness before in years, and really thought himself at the point of death.

But the next morning found him feeling so much better that his tone was more cheerful, and he even went about outdoors a little, and gave Marvel some directions about things that were in pressing need of being done.

Marvel did his best, and had the comfort of knowing that he was exceedingly useful. He bore with John's crossness, cheered him in his despondency, and waited upon him in his hours of pain and fever with patience and tenderness.

The weary days went on. Emily seemed neither better nor worse. The baby, being

tolerably well cared for, was in good health and not very troublesome. Mrs. Dimon was more useful with Marvel at her elbow to prompt and assist her. One day when John was sitting up in his chair, just well enough to be a little malicious, he said to Marvel, —

“You did n’t stay away long, Marv, did you? I s’pose you let Dean boss it over you just the same as ever, when you ’re at home.”

Marvel was at this moment busy washing out some of the baby’s clothes. He drew his hands up out of the suds, and wiping the foam off his arms with either hand, looked in John’s face with grave dignity.

“Mister Faxon,” said he, “I want to tell ye a parable. Leastways it seems to me kind o’ like a parable. Mister Faxon, the evil one what goes roarin’ round seekin’ what he may devour, with the help o’ some humans whose name I need n’t to mention, set a poor fool feller on to go off, like he was the prodigal son, and leave as good a home as anybody’s got, and to think hard of a brother what can be trusted to do fair, an’ right, an’ hon’rable, an’ don’t take onto himself no more bossin’ than he’s obleeged to. That feller come

to his senses 'fore long, and he rose and come back to his home an' his brother, and he don't want nothin' more to do with the evil one; and as fur that human, why, he forgives him and hopes the Lord will, but he ain't a-goin' to hearken to no more nonsense from him."

Having delivered this long speech, Marvel turned his back on his tempter, and, plunging his arms to the elbows in the warm soapsuds, fell to scrubbing so vigorously that further attempts at conversation were useless at present.

The following day John tried to excuse himself by saying, "Well, Marv, I did n't mean to set you on to do no more than to stan' up for your rights like a man. You know 't was your own notion, goin' off so. You can't say as I proposed it to you."

To which Marvel replied, with an astonished stare, "What did ye mean, then?"

"Why, as I said afore, to have you stan' up for your rights, and not let anybody impose upon you."

"Miss F'licia says if ye 've got good friends ye can't do better 'n to trust to 'em," Marvel began; but John interrupted impatiently, —

"Well, for my part, I don't want to be under nobody's thumb, nor tied to any old maid's apron-string; either."

This speech roused Marvel to such a white heat of anger that for a minute he was wholly unable to utter a word. When he did speak it was with the same slow dignity he had shown yesterday.

"Mister Faxon," said he, "I don't know who yer mean by old maid. When my Lord saw fittin' to take my mother up to heaven he sent one o' the best women he ever made to take her place to me, an' to my brothers an' sisters. I hope ye don't mean her, — Miss F'licia, 'cause if ye do I don't know but 't would be jest'fication in me to go right home, an' leave yer to take keer o' yer own self, an' yer own sick folks."

"O Marv! now you must n't mind what a man says when he 's so blamed mis'erable that he can't hardly speak a civil word to his own family. I don't mean it, Marv."

"Wall, I 'm glad ye don't, 'cause I could n't stan' that nohow," said Marvel, coming down to the ordinary plane. "Will ye take yer med'cine now, John?"

John took his medicine with much less ob-

jection than usual, and turned over to go to sleep.

This last encounter seemed to settle matters with John Faxon, leaving the victory with Marvel, for never another word was spoken that could give him offense while he stayed.

Emily's disease at last took a favorable turn, but John seemed to set all the doctor's prescriptions at defiance. His fever burned higher and hotter, till he was confined entirely to the bed. Weak, petulant, childish, unwilling to take his medicine or follow his physician's directions, unless they were quite agreeable and required no effort on his part, he kept Marvel busy all day, and awake much of the night.

It is not to be supposed that Marvel bore with so trying a patient, at all times, without severe struggles to maintain his patience, and honor the Master in whose name he had undertaken this hard task. There was a hollow in the biggest straw-stack where the cows had eaten it away till they had made for themselves a shelter in its very heart. Into this he often went to beg for the strength and help he needed. And he never came out to take his place again at the bedside till he

was calmed and strengthened to do and to bear whatever his Lord should lay upon him.

At last John's fever seemed to have burned out, and he, too, began to creep back to life and health. At first the improvement was slow and almost imperceptible, but when he began to sit up a little, and to eat, his strength returned more rapidly. When he began to go outdoors again, the trees, that had been green with heavy foliage when he lay down, were bare; and the leaden sky and chilly winds told that the year was waning to its close.

Kind neighbors had harvested his crops for him, and nothing had been allowed to go seriously wrong on the place. His spirit was softened as he comprehended all this, and from being childish in his weakness, he became childlike in gentle and grateful feelings.

One day when he had become able to do a little work he said to Marvel laughingly, —

"I 'm a'most afraid to let you see me doin' this for fear you 'll think I 'm gettin' so well that you can leave me. You won't go away yet awhile, will you, Marv?"

"Must go home soon 's ever I kin," said



Marvel. "But I s'pect I better stay this month out. Reckon ye can do without me after that."

"I wish I could keep you altogether, Marv. I 'd pay you good wages."

"Home 's home," said Marvel sententiously.

"I s'pose so," sighed John. "Well, you shall be well paid for all the time you 've been here."

"Did n't come fur money," said Marvel.

"I know it, Marv. Would n't nobody have taken care of me as you have, when I was crosser 'n a hedgehog, for money. But you shall have it all the same. I 'm able to pay, and I 'm bound to pay you. Before you go away I want you to let me into a secret."

"What is it?" asked Marvel.

"Why, I want to know how it 's come about that your family is jest altogether different from what Felix Windom ever was, or his children were like to be."

"I don't know as I kin, — or as you 'll believe me, if I do," said Marvel. "I reckon 't ain't wuth a while fur me to try to tell ye."

There was distrust, as well as shyness, in this answer, and John perceived it.

"Don't answer me that a way, Marv," said he.

"How do you know I ain't askin' so 's I could foller the same road? I see plain as day that it 's a road that leads up, not down, and I 've got a child now, and that makes a heap of difference. And, moreover, I 've been so near to t'other world that I could n't help thinkin' some about it. I tell you the honest truth, Marv ; I jest would like to get into that way, if I could find out how to begin."

Marvel had looked at John doubtfully when he began to say this, and John had returned his look with one of grave earnestness. Marvel's face flushed with joy as the conviction grew upon him that John was not at his old tricks, but was truly inquiring the way. He hesitated how to begin, feeling utterly incapable.

"Ye better ask them as is officers," said he at length. "I 'm only a private, and don't know none too much — make the best of me."

"You know the way, and I 'd rather trust to your tellin' than anybody's, for I believe in you, Marv. So go ahead. I 'm jest altogether willin' to turn about now, if I can only get a start on that road."

"Wall, lemme see if I kin tell ye," said Marvel,

fixing his eyes on a row of low bushes that skirted the creek, and vigorously twisting a lock of hay as he talked. "If ye reely want to git inter the way, I reckon ye 've got to begin as we begun."

"Yes, that 's it! How did you begin?"

"Why, it was jest readin' the Bible first off. When Granny died, ma was with her, an' she made her promise as how she 'd read the Testament out loud to us child'en, every day of her life. Ma thought a heap of Granny, 'cause she fetched her up. Ma never was much to her home, but lived with Granny. So she promised, and when she come home, after Granny was buried, she did it. I kin see, now, jest how she flushed up first time she did it." Here Marvel came to a full stop, with his eyes fixed on the fringe of the little stream. They had seated themselves on the ground, or rather on the straw against the sunny side of the big straw-stack, — the same one in which was Marvel's closet.

"Well, what next?" said John with some impatience, seeing that the story was not likely to be continued.

Marvel gave a little start, and awoke out of his reverie. "What next? Where was I? Oh, ma

read every day. Pa did n't help her much. 'Peared to think 't wa n't much use. Did n't say much, but was kind o' scornful like, — and I, — I thought them times I wa' n't nobody 'thout I follered after pa in everything, so I was more scornfuller 'n he was. But ma kep' it up, all the same. Ma had the best kind o' grit, — the kind that keeps right on a-doin'. She did n't never say much, but she kep' right on a-doin'."

Again Marvel seemed to have come to the end of the story.

"Well, what else?" said John.

"Not anything else, as I know of, only Dean seemed to take to it. He got so he could read, and he would read when ma could n't, and so," said Marvel, at a loss how to proceed, "they kep' right on doin' till ma died."

"But I don't see! Was that all they did? Jest readin' the Bible?" said John.

"Jest readin' the Bible and doin' what it said," said Marvel. "No use a readin', ye know, if ye don't do what it says. They did both."

"Well, I reckon I 've got information enough to last me a spell," said John. "Anybody can set to and read the Bible every day, but when it

comes to doin' jest as it says in everything," —  
He paused in deep thought.

"No use readin' 'thout doin'," persisted Marvel.

John pondered long, and then asked once more, —

"And that 's all, is it?"

"I reckon they begun askin' 'fore long. Reckon a body has to ask 'fore they git fur on that road," said Marvel.

"Askin'?" said John. "You mean" —

"Askin' the Lord. 'T ain't always an easy road, ye know. They begun to ask, soon 's they knew they might, for one thing and another, till they got so they asked 'bout everything."

Again John pondered long in silence.

"That 's all, I reckon," said Marvel, thinking he was waiting for him to go on.

"But you? — you was kind o' scornful you said. I reckon I 've been some scornful like, myself. How 'd you get turned round?"

"I jest turned round, and promised to love God, after ma died," said Marvel.

"Anybody can promise to do what 's right, — or try to, — but they can't promise to love if they don't love, as I see," said John.

"I did," said Marvel simply.

John's head went down between his knees, so that his face could not be seen. He groaned aloud. Marvel was distressed, thinking it was all because of his poor way of directing John that he found the way so dark and difficult. He tried to think what more he could say. Looking around, in his perplexity, his eyes fell upon the hole in the stack where he had so often hidden to beg for help to do, or to bear. The look prompted his next word.

"What seems 's if ye can 't do, ye must ask help to do," said he.

John was silent a long time, with face still hidden.

"Reckon I ought to feed them cows. Sun 's gettin' low. An' ye ought to go in. I 've told ye all I know," said Marvel.

"Well, go then," said John, but without raising his head.

Marvel went a few steps, — then stopped, and looked at the bowed head with wistful face. Then he went back and, stooping over it, said with the air of one revealing a secret, —

"Ther 's a splendid good place to pray in that hole the cows have gnawed out 'n the straw-stack. I 've tried it times an' times, when you was sick, an' rantankerous, an' I was most out o' patience, an' to my wits' end."

Having imparted this bit of information he limped away as fast as he could go, to attend to the cows.

John sat still yet awhile longer. The great struggle was upon him. He knew now what he was to do. Something within him said rebelliously, "Go into that hole to pray, at the bidding of *that idiot!* — I reckon not!" And another voice seemed to be saying just as clearly, "It 's now or never! Now or never!"

Then he thought how through all his sickness Marvel had watched over him, and tended him. "I ought to be ashamed of thinking that thing. I reckon I owe my life to the poor lad, anyhow!" he said half aloud.

With the battle still raging within, he got up, and almost against his own will, as it seemed to him, he forced his feet to walk into that cavity in the stack where Marvel had been used to pray.

He kneeled down, and the battle was won. Whether he prayed or not he scarcely knew; but he knew that his will yielded, and that henceforth God was his God, and Christ his Saviour.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## LAST WORDS.

FIVE years have rolled away, bringing many changes upon Billow Prairie. That house which Dean and Marvel were to help build for Albert Lewis, in return for the work he had done on their new dwelling, has gone up, but a little over a mile from both homes; and from it, on this bright June Sabbath, comes a proud and happy pair, bringing their first babe to baptism in the new church, that was dedicated only a few months ago. There is not so much change in the young father that we shall not quickly recognize in him Albert Lewis. He is only a little more mature and manly looking. The mother, slighter, and perhaps a little paler than of old, has Dio's bright dark eyes and fair complexion.

The church is full to overflowing. There are several reasons for this. It is not a very large church, and it is yet a new thing to have a church in the vicinity. Moreover, the number of families

upon Billow Prairie has increased. And this is an extraordinary occasion. No wonder the church is full.

After the opening exercises, the pastor takes in his arms the little infant, which the young parents present before him; and putting the baptismal water upon its forehead, says solemnly,

“Felicia, I baptize thee into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Amen.”

There are tears in Dio’s eyes, as the babe is given back into her arms, and she registers in her heart the vow of consecration.

Then John Faxon and Emily come forward, bringing a baby boy. John looks somewhat older and graver, and Emily is scarcely as fresh and fair as before the cares of motherhood rested upon her; but both faces are serenely joyful, and they look with pardonable pride upon the three fair olive plants that have sprung up around their table. This is their first boy. Will any smile contemptuously when they hear it named John Marvel Faxon? We think not. Marvel is respected in all the neighborhood for his steadfast piety, and loved for his kindness and willingness

to help in every time of trouble. Moreover, it is well understood that he is almost as much at home in John Faxon's house as in his own; and John feels that he owes him a debt of grateful love that he can never repay.

There is not to be a sermon by the pastor to-day. A younger man, one not yet ordained, is to speak to the people. As he rises we ought to know that broad, genial face, and yet it is so changed by the subtle power of mind and soul over matter that we are in doubt whether we may not be mistaken. But it certainly is none other than Max Boyd.

Clear, plain, practical, earnest are the words he speaks. Just what we might expect, who heard his first attempts at public prayer and exhortation. Those of the congregation who knew him of old soon forget that it is one of themselves, and one formerly among the roughest and most irreligious of their number, who is speaking to them. Their hearts are moved to stronger desires after the greatest good. They are stirred to crave more earnestly that best gift that includes all others, — the gift of the Holy Spirit.

When the service has closed there is a little

pause, — and then all his old acquaintances come crowding forward to greet the young speaker. Dean is there with his young wife, the eldest daughter of his former employer, now his partner, Mr. Budd.

Marvel and Rolfe are there too. Marvel is little changed. More robust than of old, more comely and manly looking, for the light, rather scanty beard is yet sufficient to cover the thin cheeks and mouth, to the advantage of the whole face. We well know that any other than the outward change will be for the better, because he is one of God's own children, and therefore sure to go on from grace to grace, and from strength to strength.

Rolfe, at twenty-one, is just the straightforward, reliable, manly young fellow one likes to see. Never putting himself forward, he is yet ready for every good work, and has a special faculty for applying his force at exactly the right time and place to make it tell.

Vinnie too is present. She has grown and changed past all our recognition, save for the family resemblance. Some think her even more

beautiful than Dio. She does not press eagerly forward to speak to Max, as do the others. For some reason, best known to herself, she remains demure and silent in the corner of her pew till he comes to greet her. But we will not criticise, since he appears pleased and satisfied. Marvel and Rolfe and the little girls will have to spare Vinnie some day, but they need her yet awhile longer. Lottie is but a slip of a girl, only partially developed in body or mind, but Lottie has found the Way. And Dean and Dio believe her to be a little Christian. "Ma's way" has a firm hold upon every one of the dear flock she left behind, when the Lord called her from earth.

Silence Parker, serene and sweet, and frank as ever, has grown tall, and strong, and rosy. She is now at the head of her grandfather's household, for the good grandmother has gone before, and her feeble, aged companion is only waiting for his call to join her. Silence's father has married a second wife, and made for himself a new home in the Far West. Silence has been there once, on a visit, but she begged to be allowed to return to the dear old friends who needed her so much in

their declining years, and now John Lewis thinks he has established a claim upon her that will keep her permanently on Billow Prairie.

Carrie Williams is as good and almost as shy as ever. She sticks closely to her mother's side as yet. Whether any one will ever succeed in winning her away is doubtful.

Horace and Marion Boyd are present, of course, to listen to their brother. We wish we had something better worth chronicling concerning them than anything we yet know. Horace is fond and proud of his sister, and he and their mother supply her generously with money to gratify the love for dress and display that are at present her absorbing passion. The brother and sister think it no task to ride ten miles to attend a dance, and are amply repaid by the knowledge that Marion is much admired in the circles she most frequents. Horace and Marion are yet in chrysalis. Whether their wings will ever grow appears not yet. But we are sure that Max is praying, and will not fail to speak words of warning and entreaty whenever a favorable opportunity presents itself.

Mr. and Mrs. Bradford are present at the

service. They come forward with smiling faces, proud of the claim to old acquaintanceship.

Miss Felicia is not there. No one asks or wonders why. Many speak of her, and say, one to another, "I'm glad they named the baby Felicia. I thought they would;" and many a rising tear is brushed away as they say, "How we do miss her!"

Dio has remained sitting in her place because her baby is asleep upon her knees, and she will not waken it, since she would gladly remain to the close of the Sabbath school, which follows the service with a short intermission. Therefore Max, after speaking to others, comes to her for greeting. As they shake hands he says in a low voice, intended for her ear only, —

"I'm glad you named her Felicia. I thought you would."

And Dio replies, her eyes shining through tears, "We do miss her so, Max! It's such a loss!"

After the Sabbath school is over, when they are walking homeward together, Max hears the story of Miss Felicia's departure. For weeks and months she had toiled and striven and prayed, giving time, tact, influence, energy, and money

lavishly to make the church on Billow Prairie an accomplished fact. At last the work was done, and then came the dedication. She had been wholly absorbed in the duties and services of the day, working early and late to provide entertainment for the ministers, several of whom stopped at her father's house. Among these was one James Bird, who thought he saw in this cheerful, efficient, self-sacrificing woman exactly the person he needed to cheer and help him in his distant, difficult field, and to be a mother to five little ones left motherless. So strong was this conviction that he lingered in the vicinity, and made his way back to the fireside of the Lewis family again and again. His case was urgent, and he was not backward or lukewarm in pressing it. He was a fine, frank, genial man, highly esteemed and much beloved by his brother ministers. Even Miss Felicia's father, who would miss her most, had not a word to say against the union. John promised to supply her place in the home as soon as Silence and her grandfather could be induced to unite the two households, till which time Lottie Windom could keep the domestic machinery running in very fair order.



What could Miss Felicia do but yield? The courtship and preparation were both short. Some weeks crowded full of cares and work, leave-takings, good wishes, and expressions of warm affection and regret, and then Miss Felicia was no more on Billow Prairie.

All this is rehearsed to Max as they walk.

"He 's a lucky man! That 's all I have to say," says Max when he has heard all.

"That he is!" says John Faxon, who, with a little girl in either hand is going to take dinner with Marvel, who proudly carries his namesake in his arms, while Emily walks at his side.

"I reckon them five little children needs her more 'n we do," says Marvel. "An' she 's boun' to go where she 's needed the most, if we do have to be left to 'sconsolation."

"Dio says every one of those children are boys," puts in Vinnie.

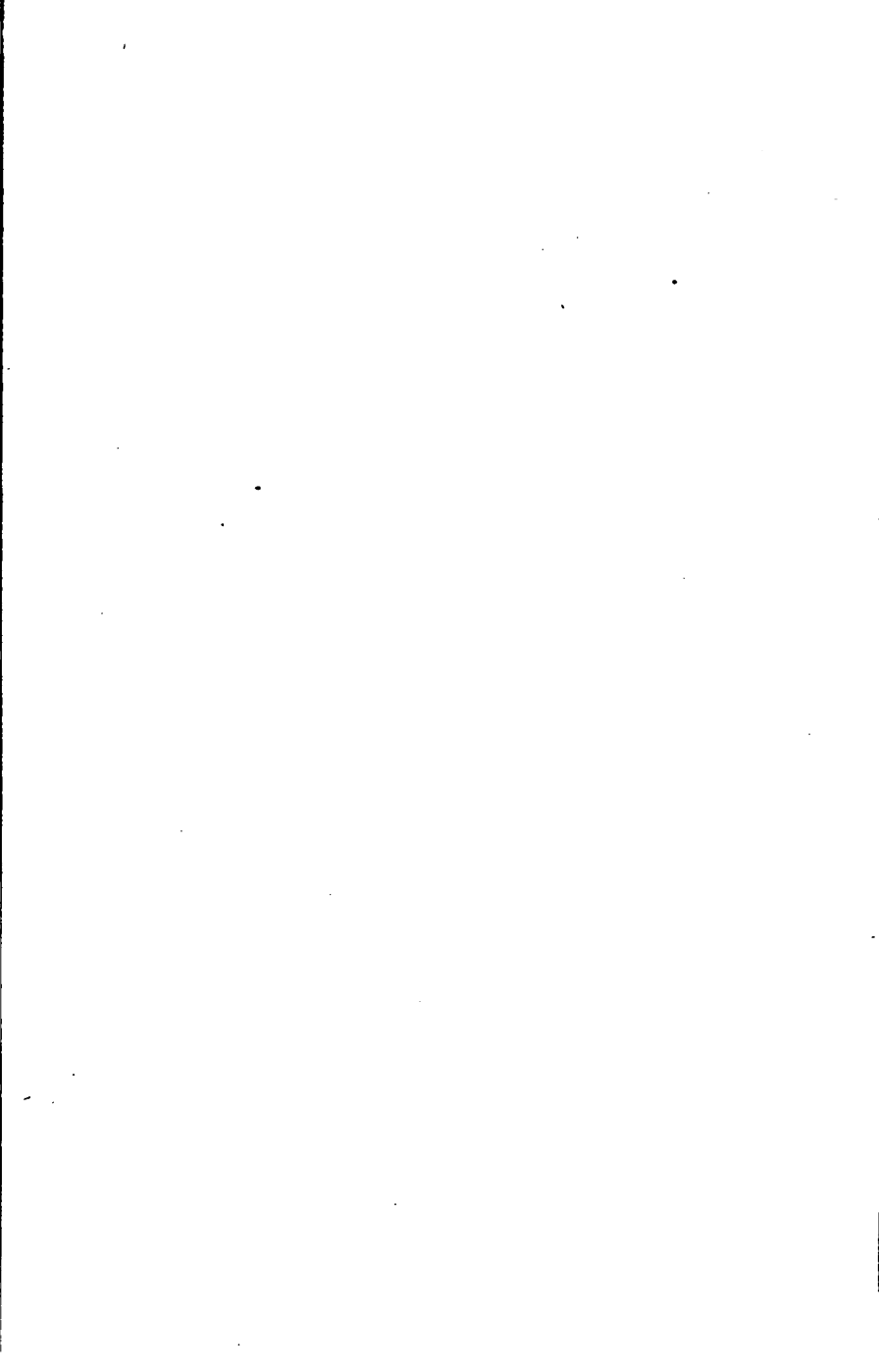
"So much the more they need to have a mother," Marvel answers. "Girls can get along a heap better 'n boys 'thout no mother."

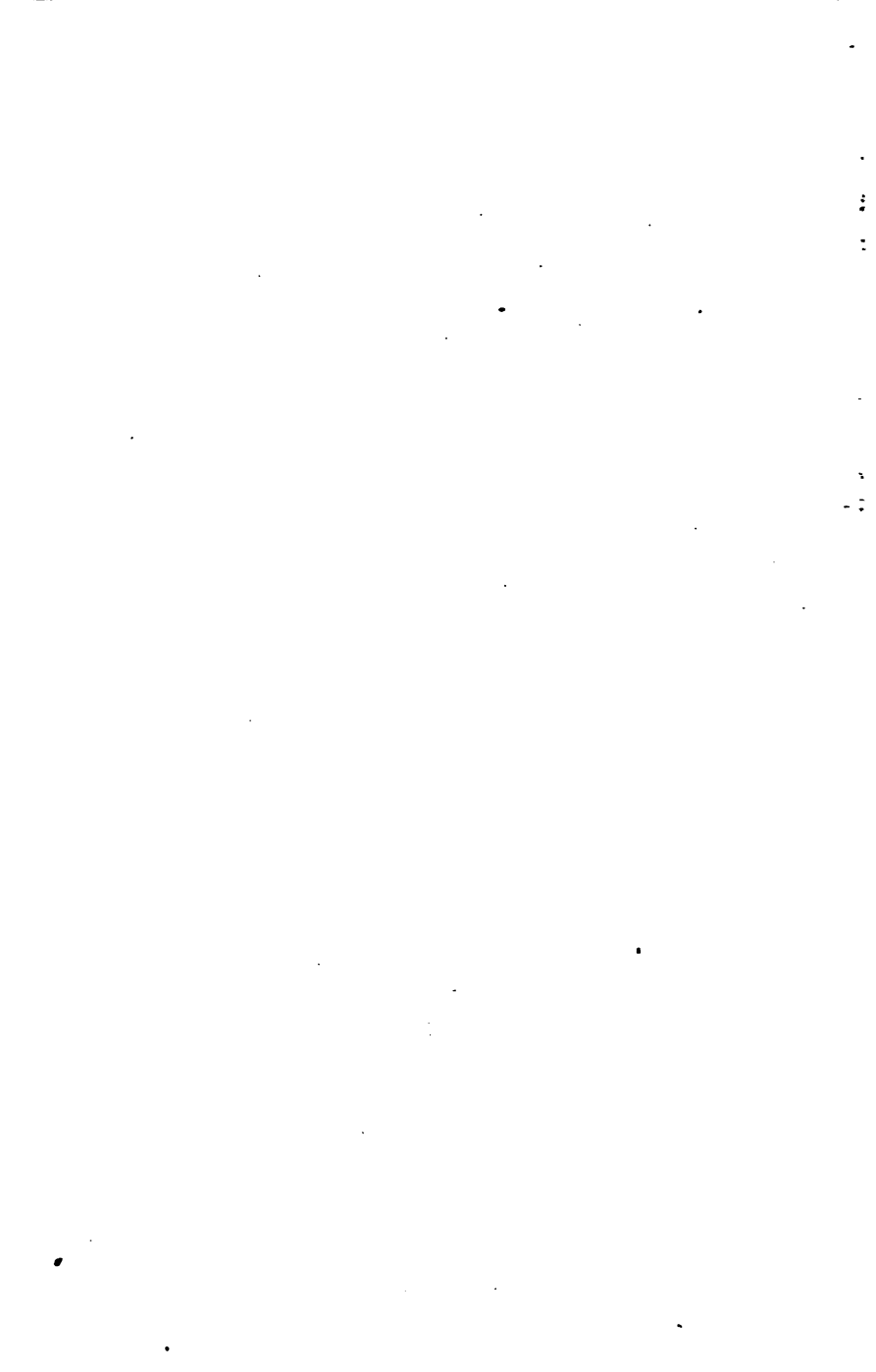
"I don't know about that," says Vinnie. "Dio and I would n't have amounted to much but for Miss Felicia."

“She has been a dear, good mother to us all,” says Dean. “We owe more to her than we can ever repay.”

“Reckon I know what Miss F’licia would say to that! She ’d say, pay it to anybody that needs it, whenever ye kin, and wherever ye kin,” Marvel replies.







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